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A FIGHT WITH FORTUNE BY MORTIMER COLLINS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

COLLECTION

BRITISH AUTHORS

THIRTEENTH EDITION

1856

A FIRST WITH FORTY-NINE MORE VOLUMES

IN FIVE VOLUMES

1856

A FIGHT WITH FORTUNE.

BY

MORTIMER COLLINS,
AUTHOR OF "SWEET AND TWENTY," ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. I.

LEIPZIG
BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1877.

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TO
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
WILLIAM JAMES RICHMOND COTTON, M.P.,
LORD MAYOR OF LONDON.

PRINCEPS MUNICIPALIS:
MUSIS AMICUS.

TO

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

WILLIAM JAMES RICHMOND COTTON, M.P.

FOR THE COUNTY OF

PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

MUSIC BY

A FIGHT WITH FORTUNE.

CHAPTER I.

A PANE OF GLASS.

"In utraque fortuna paratus."

"PREPARED for either fortune." A grand motto, belonging to a strong race, who in their time have shown their right to hold it. Not everyone can bear both forms of mortal chance. Adversity usually strengthens the character: prosperity softens it in one way, hardens it in another. In adverse times you understand the seriousness of life! You help a friend, or take help from him, loyally; you eat and drink and toil and have a glass for a friend, though the times are hard, and a kiss for your wife, though it may be to kiss away the tears of trouble. Come the prosperous breezes of fortunate finance: can you bear them as well? Can you come nobly to the front, and help, in wise fashion, the less fortunate? Or does prosperity harden your heart against penury, while at the same time it softens

your own mental and physical fibre—so that you, once poor, regard poverty as a crime—so that you, once a hard-worker and plain-liver, find a drive in a carriage and pair strong exercise, and dismiss your cook because she has not a new *entrée* for every day in the year. The truth is that few men—I might almost say no men—can use wealth wisely unless they were born to it, or have an hereditary tendency in that direction. “*In utraque fortuna paratus*” is a strong motto to assume; as strong as the famous *Forti nihil difficile* of England’s present Premier.

Charles Cotton, an orphan, living at Englehurst with a stern kind-hearted uncle who was a Plymouth brother, is the hero of my historiette. His uncle Richard, an old bachelor, had achieved a bread-and-cheese fortune, and was therewith content. Charlie, son of a younger brother who was drowned at sea, was his chief care. Master Charles was a tiresome troublesome youngster. Richard Cotton had apprenticed him, at the age of fourteen, to Ralph Wrangel, plumber and glazier, whose ancestors had been plumbers and glaziers at Englehurst since the Conquest, according to village tradition. Wrangel was a plausible fellow, with three daughters, the youngest of them about five years older than young Cotton, and all three ready for

what, in village life, reflects the flirtation of the higher classes. Poor Charles Cotton was at a great disadvantage. He liked a bit of fun; he was not stupidly shy; but what is a boy to do against three young women older than himself? Old Wrangel taught him his trade well enough, swearing at him fiercely during the process; for this young Cotton cared not. He even preferred Wrangel's strong language to the cynical scoldings of his pious uncle. But he positively preferred either to the affectionate allurements of Sarah and Jane and Emily Wrangel.

These three village girls were typical. Sarah was tall, thin, demure; taught a class at the Sunday-school; never looked at you except aslant, through the corner of her eyes. Jane had long dark eyelashes, shading dark eyes, and in her earliest youth was pretty in a way; but it was a scrofulous prettiness, which in time became ugly; and at no period could she walk with anything like grace. Emily was plump as a partridge, and ruddy as a milkmaid; and, it strikes me, the best of the lot. All three made a dead set at Charles Cotton, the only good-looking boy in Englehurst. All three were foiled by what they decided was his invincible stupidity.

Sarah couldn't get that boy to the Sunday school, do what she would. He was such a good-looking boy, and it seemed such a pity he shouldn't be

taught what was right. Well, he was good-looking, Miss Sarah. At sixteen, thin as a lath, he had run up to six feet and weighed twelve stone, and his hair curled over his head like vine-blossoms, close and crisp. But he did not care about Sunday school, and Miss Sarah gave him up in disgust. Then Jane tried, with those long dark narrow eyes of hers, and the pouting mouth that conceals unsound teeth, and the general unwholesome prettiness. It was "No, thank you," with Charlie. Emily amused him more, for Emily was very plump and very stupid, a combination not altogether unwelcome to certain classes of men. But Emily did not detain him long.

Our unfortunate hero was born with an imagination—the worst faculty in the world, unless you can use it on the Stock Exchange. It is hard to say what a man with an imagination ought to do, in the unimaginative grooves of ordinary English life. Yet is it the man with the imagination who works out the great conquests of England. He annexes empires, and explores continents. Now Charles Cotton's absurd imagination drew him towards a pretty creature far beyond his reach, Squire Englehurst's daughter Cecilia, whom he saw in church on Sundays, and now and then on week days, walking through the village. There was something in-

describable about Miss Englehurst that he could not perceive in either of Wrangel's pretty daughters. The French called it *je ne sais quoi* ages ago. An Englishman would probably say of such a woman, "She's a real lady." Mind you, a real lady may be born in a cottage; it is a mere question of race, I suspect. Any way, Charles Cotton had a kind of repulsion for Wrangel's daughters; while he never met Miss Englehurst without regarding her with an eye of pained delight. She was too far above him for any thought of love. Well might Cotton, plumber and glazier, come to that conclusion, since Englehurst was about the finest place in the county, and the old Squire was reputed to be worth twenty thousand a year. Is there not something absurd in this girl-worship? Why, O plumber and glazier, handsome and agile though you are, dream for a moment of the child of a man whose house is approached through a long avenue of oaks, and who drives his coach with four horses? Respect the high strata of society. Sarah, or Jane, or Emily—the demure, the flighty, or the plump—is quite ready for you. Don't waste your time on the impossible.

Excellent advice, but not suited to Charles Cotton. He had his ambitions. Among his treasures were a few old books, and in them book-plates of

his ancestors, three hanks of cotton on the shield, and the famous defiant motto which is placed at the head of this chapter. He had often questioned his old uncle about the owners of these books. Who were William and Robert Cotton who had possession of them more than a hundred years ago? Old Richard Cotton, who had no ambitions, and who considered that pride had been the ruin of his family, did not encourage any questions of this sort. "They are dead and gone long ago," he would say to his nephew, "and don't you trouble your head about people who have gone before you, but stick to your work, and perhaps in time you'll have as good a business as old Wrangel."

Nevertheless Charles Cotton did trouble himself about people dead and gone, and made up his mind that he would become a scholar, and not a plumber and glazier. Not that he despised his work. He felt proud of doing his best in everything, and by the time he had finished his apprenticeship he was certainly the best workman Wrangel had. Amongst his old books was Ainsworth's Latin Dictionary, a huge volume dedicated to Doctor Richard Meade, Physician to George II. It had been well thumbed in its time, and Charles, when a boy, had often opened it, and wished he could learn Latin. One day it occurred to him

that in this book he could find out the meaning of those words with which he was so familiar, yet which had so often puzzled him: *In utraque fortuna paratus*. When he asked his uncle their meaning, the old man said,

"I never meddle with languages that don't belong to my country. Good plain English is enough for me. If any of our relations who are dead and gone chose to put that gibberish with their names, it is their affair, not mine."

"But look here, uncle," said Charles, "in this book there is written *E libris Ricardi Cotton*. Don't you think that must mean Richard Cotton? That is the same as your name: you must know something about that."

"If that means Richard Cotton, all I can say is that he didn't know how to spell his name, which, thank God, I do. Don't bother yourself with that gibberish, and with people dead and gone."

What old Cotton called his "fine relations" was a sore point with him. His own account of the story to his very confidential friends—for he never talked of his affairs in Englehurst—was that his father was a broken-down gentleman, who had died very much in debt, leaving him and his brother Charles at an early age. Their mother had died years before, unable to bear the constant worry and

trouble that her husband brought her. The children had been neglected, and had received very little education. Richard the elder had profited by his father's conduct. He seemed to be exactly opposite to him. When extravagance forced the father into extreme poverty, he was always talking of his position, and Richard knew how often he had been refused help by his relations, for they were tired of helping him. Therefore, when he died, Richard determined to cut off all connection with the family, and to work hard and help his younger brother. Unfortunately the younger brother required only too much help; he could never succeed in anything.

"We ought to be gentlemen, Richard, instead of working like this," he would say.

"Where's the money to make you a gentleman?" Richard would reply.

One day Charles made the acquaintance of a young sailor in the merchant service, who persuaded him to go to sea. Richard, with all his sternness, was fond of his young brother, and did not like parting with him; but he reflected that he would never work on shore, and that, once out at sea, he would be obliged to work. So he used the greater part of the money he had already saved by industry and

spare living to pay the apprenticeship premium, and to give Charles an outfit.

"The lad may do at sea," he said to himself, "though I should not be surprised to see him turn up any day, and hear he had deserted the vessel."

However, Charles did not turn up unexpectedly, but made a first-rate sailor; and when his apprenticeship came to an end, his employers gave him a good berth. Richard always made him welcome when he came home from his journeys, which was about once in two years.

Everything seemed to be going well with the brothers for many years. But a sailor is sure to do something odd at some time or other. When Charles came home from one of his journeys he announced to his brother that he should have to be six weeks on shore, as the vessel was to be repaired.

"That won't trouble me, old fellow, so long as you can amuse yourself."

But Richard was not prepared for the particular form of amusement that Charles adopted. For the first week that a sailor is on shore he is perfectly happy, looking up all his old friends, and "treating" everyone who wishes to be "treated." So long as a sailor's money lasts he cannot even refuse a beggar. By the end of a week both money and excitement are generally gone, and he longs to be off again.

Now Charles had, when home on a previous occasion, become intimate with the family of a brother sailor. His sailor friend had joined another vessel, and was now away. Charles thought he could not do less than pay his respects to his friend's family, so he called on them.

Mrs. Mildmay was a widow, with one son and two daughters, the youngest daughter, Alice, being nearly seventeen. When Charles had last seen Alice she seemed quite a little girl, and was in short frocks, but now she had grown much, and was very pretty. In fact, Master Charles fell desperately in love with her, and found no difficulty in passing the time.

The mother, who was a mild helpless woman, did not seem to understand what caused Charles's frequent visits to the house. The six weeks were lengthened into nine weeks, and Charles, impatient of what appeared to him to be a very long courtship, persuaded Alice to marry him secretly. When at last he went to sea again, he sent the following letter to his brother—

“DEAR RICHARD,

“Don't cut up rough. I had so much time on my hands that I got spliced. Alice is a nice little craft, and I am sure you will take care of her if

she wants a friend. Next time I come I'll provide for her, for I'm getting a good screw now.

“CHARLES.”

But Charles never did come home again. The news of his loss came just before the birth of his son, and caused the mother's death. Richard was angry enough at his brother's marriage, and had vowed to have nothing more to say to him. But when he heard the sad news he was only too glad that he had the opportunity of offering help to his brother's wife, and when she was gone he determined to devote himself to the child.

“I will bring him up,” he said to himself, “in such a way that he shall not have any of the mad fancies of his father. They say that sort of thing is in the blood, but I don't believe it. I'll bring him up to be an honest English tradesman, and he shall have no fine ideas about being a gentleman.”

Thus we find our hero had been carefully trained to be a respectable workman. But why, O why, did Richard Cotton preserve that old chest full of books? Was it the books or was it in the blood? At any rate, Richard Cotton asked himself this question when it was too late to remedy the evil, supposing it was the books.

“Why did I keep the stupid things?” he said to

himself many a time when he found the boy always poring over them.

He had kept them when his father's effects were sold, because he thought he should like to have something in remembrance of his father; but he did not like to catch himself indulging in sentimental thoughts, for he tried to persuade himself that he was the sternest of men. When the books were being sold for their weight in waste paper, for they appeared to be a shabby old lot, he bought up a few without reference to what they were, and put them into an old chest. He never afterwards looked at them, but the chest formed a table in Charles Cotton's bed-room, and when the lad found the books there, he got them all out, and made himself a rough set of bookshelves, and arranged them. When he had done this he took his uncle to see, thinking he had done something clever.

"What can you want with all that rubbish stuck up on the wall, Charles?" said the old man. "You'll never read them."

"Oh, won't I, uncle!" said the boy.

"You'll have enough to do," said his uncle, "when you leave off schooling, to learn a trade, and it's nigh time you commenced. When you get as old as I am you'll not care to read more than your

Bible and your Almanac, with just a look at your newspaper now and then."

It did not occur to Richard Cotton at this time that his nephew would trouble himself to read such musty old books. But as time went on he found that he was constantly reading them; and, as the boy earned money of his own, he bought books at a second-hand bookshop in a neighbouring town. Not books only did he pick up at this shop, but guidance in his use of books, and help in learning Latin. It was not often he could get time to go, for the town was eight miles distant, but he never lost a chance. The bookseller was named Ravensbourne, a man of good family, son of a famous mathematician, who had a special theory of his own as to the roots of negative quantities. He was a man of eccentric tendencies, this bookseller, who having inherited a moderate competency, took to bookselling simply because he loved books. He had a brother who wrote books, and very brilliant ones, but he had no ambition to follow in his track. No, his ideal of enjoyment was a second-hand bookshop in a country town, from behind the counter whereof he could study character. His idea of exercise was a bicycle on a country road: his brief holiday usually took him to Italy or Switzerland. His catalogues were choice collections of literature: if he thought a

book bad he simply said so in plain terms: also he managed to introduce criticisms on the conduct of the local magnates, which made them very irate. Fancy a second-hand bookseller venturing in his catalogue to laugh at his Worship the Mayor!

Ravensbourne's knowledge was miscellaneous; but what he had picked up himself he gladly imparted to Cotton, in whom he seemed to recognize a kindred spirit. And if any rare book came in which seemed likely to suit Cotton, Ravensbourne kept it back for him—to read at least, if not to buy.

Thus when my story opens, Charles Cotton, the plumber and glazier, was a young man of no ordinary attainments. He could put in a pane of glass as well as any glazier in the kingdom, and if he could not write Latin verse as well as any scholar, he was perhaps in a fair way to do so. He was at this time one-and-twenty years old. His coming of age was of no importance to him or anyone else; for what difference does it make to a plumber and glazier who works hard for his five-and-twenty or thirty shillings a week, whether he is twenty or two-and twenty years of age? He had, with the help of his friend Ravensbourne, been trying to form some plan whereby he could give up his trade, and make his small stock of learning of some use.

"Suppose you tried to get a place somewhere as a clerk to begin with," said Ravensbourne.

"No," said Charles, "I would rather work as a tradesman than be a poor miserable clerk, obliged to keep up an appearance on a labourer's wages."

So it was agreed that nothing could be done at present till Charles had money at his command. Therefore must he work patiently for some years and save money. But whatever happened he would keep his motto in front of him, and be prepared for either fortune. Was he so well prepared for good fortune as for evil fortune? We none of us know whether we are till we are tried.

One other fact concerning my hero must I mention before proceeding with his history. He wrote verse, and tried to fancy that he might some day be a poet. Most young men do write verse, and fancy themselves poets; and why shouldn't they? It amuses them, and doesn't hurt the public so long as they don't publish their productions. But whether we are scholars or only plumbers and glaziers or bakers or candlestick-makers, we can all put a little poetry into life if we please. A man may be a poet without being able to write verse. There may be a poem in a picture, or in the arrangement of a few flowers, or in the building of a church or a house, even in the putting in of a pane of glass.

The whole creation itself is to the poetic mind one grand long poem, of which a fresh piece can be read every day.

Amongst the books in Charles Cotton's bedroom was one entitled, "The Genuine Works of Charles Cotton, Esq.;" its date was 1715. A quaint book, with illustrations even quainter than the letter-press; but our young plumber and glazier was proud of it. He could see it was not the highest form of poetry. He tingled all through to produce something poetic, if only it were a poetic hose for a pump or a poetic pane of glass. He was at the age of inchoate ideas. We all pass through that stage, all of us who are worth anything; and then we pass a few years in wondering at our own folly; and then, *we begin*. Experience has taught us, and the world has to listen when we speak.

It is a bright May morning. Somebody has managed to break a plate-glass window in Squire Englehurst's library. An imperious message comes to Wrangel, and he sends off Charles Cotton at once.

"Look alive," he says. "The Squire likes things done prompt."

So the young fellow shoulders his glass and off he goes. Just outside the lodge gate he meets the Squire, who is trying a new cob, an Irish one, with

a doubtful temper. On goes Cotton through the avenue, arched like the nave of a Gothic Cathedral, and reaches the house. What terraces of floral colour! What flashing fountains! What a long line of windows, diamond-coloured by the sun! What grand cedars and oaks, the gift of elder generations!

He turned to the rear of the house by a wicket gate, but heard a lovely voice singing on the lawn in front of the house, and the sweet song rang in his ears for many a day.

He heard the song as he went round to the back. He caught just a glimpse of a fairy form upon the lawn. Gowned in some distractingly delicious attire, she was to him a creature beyond the energy of thought. He felt in another world. He was shown by a footman into the library, and at once set to work upon the square of glass, anxious rather to escape from the magic influence of this charming girl.

A simple child, for all that. Any gentleman of her own rank who saw that she was loveable would gradually bring her to the point at which he might tell her so. Nothing easier. Love rules the world. Cecilia Englehurst was only a girl. But what in the world would that girl have said or done could she have imagined that the young fellow who had come

in to mend a pane of glass was capable of regarding her as a creature of his own species?

Charles Cotton put in that pane of glass. Cecilia Englehurst was picking roses meanwhile, to put in a vase for her father's delight. Odd, very odd; those two young people look at each other, shyly, now and then. It occurred to Cecilia that the plumber and glazier was a tall stalwart fellow, with intelligence in his eyes and firmness on his lips. It occurred to Charles Cotton that Cecilia Englehurst was the loveliest girl he had ever seen. They exchanged no word with each other. As to Cecilia, she looked at the young glazier, not altogether with an unfriendly glance, and thought that, if he could not help being a glazier, 'twas a cruel pity he couldn't help being so handsome.

That day that pane of plate-glass formed a definite point in the life of Charles Cotton. He thought of it ever after. He thought of the grand library at Englehurst, with its big shelves of books from floor to ceiling, bound in vellum and Russia and tree-calf, and its thin librarian (a French abbé and a famous mathematician), seated at a table in a bay window, so absent from the world that the pane of glass was put in without his knowledge. The librarian was at that moment examining a theorem of Sir William Hamilton's on Quaternions, with a view to its utter

demolition; and had a troop of cavalry charged in at one window and out at the other, he would probably have known as little about it as Archimedes knew of the Roman soldier who killed him in the middle of a problem. Charles Cotton thought of the beautiful girl whom he saw upon the lawn among her roses, singing gaily in the sunshine, while a thrush tried vainly to mock her melody. He thought how many a time she would look upon the lovely scene through the clear crystal pane which he had mortised into the lofty casement. It was a dream in his brain that day.

And Charles Cotton had need of consolatory visions. Englehurst village yielded him little satisfaction. There were not young fellows enough of the right sort to get up a good game of cricket. They were a lazy loafing lot, encouraged in idleness by the landlord of the principal public-house, a porpoise of a man, with blubber for brain, and a fine idea of encouraging poaching and theft. His shrift would have been short if the Squire could have had his way; but when Mr. Englehurst was travelling abroad a scoundrel steward had given him a long lease. All the Squire could do was to discharge his steward; and here was this fat ruffian, half a mile from his lodge gates, demoralising the whole population. It is amazing what harm may be

done in a country village by an unscrupulous publican. I, although I am quite against the tyranny of Sir Wilfrid Lawson's proposal, would gladly welcome an Act by which the inhabitants of any city, borough, or parish might limit the number of public-houses it should contain.

Charles Cotton had nothing in common with the other young fellows in the village, whose incorrigible indolence disgusted him. He liked work. He liked a long walk with his bulldog Holdfast at his heels, a white dog that weighed half a hundred-weight, and was as level as a billiard-table across the shoulders. He liked a swim in the river Engle, which zigzagged pleasantly through the Squire's noble demesne. He liked his game of draughts with his uncle Richard on winter evenings, and wished he could have knocked the superior game of chess into that worthy old gentleman's rather drowsy brain. He liked, when Englefield village was fast asleep, to read over and over again his few quaint books, and dream of the world outside that village which as yet he had seen so little.

Now, as a result of these likings, Charles Cotton came to be considered in the village as a "stuck-up young fellow." The dolts who surrounded Jenkins, landlord of the Five Horseshoes, hated him heartily. They did no work. They drank sour beer all day,

with salt in it to encourage another glass. Fat floundering Jenkins detested the sight of a well-built and well-set-up young fellow, who never entered his house, and passed it with a certain manifest contempt. He used to grumble over this insult of nights with his cronies. Charles Cotton was the only youngster in the village that he hadn't got under his thumb. Jenkins, who dared not drink beer himself, for a glass would have exploded him, treated to unlimited beer anyone who would abuse Cotton and the Squire. But they abused the Squire with bated breath, for it was remembered that once on a time he had so soundly thrashed an impudent fellow with his dog-whip, that the scoundrel had never walked comfortably since.

Jenkins's anger against Charles Cotton, simply for being independent of him, grew so strong that two of his pestilent parasites, Joe Bates and George Bond, both in a chronic state of *delirium tremens*, thought they would commend themselves to their flabby employer by serving Cotton some rascally trick. Now our hero liked fishing on summer evenings in the river Engle, and had leave to fish the parts best preserved. Bates and Bond thought they would take an opportunity to shove him into the river, thereby giving infinite delight to the orbicular Jenkins. Not for a moment did they doubt their

power to do it. Cotton was a tall fellow, but thin and weak, they judged; they were of that stout short build too common in bucolic districts, where dwarfs are quite the majority—dwarfs, I fear, in brain as well as bone.

Now it happened one eventide, when Cotton was whipping the stream with scant success, and Holdfast was looking on with that affectionate gravity which only the bull-dog possesses, that a gentleman loitered along the soft green margin of the Engle in an easy observant way. He was a notable man. His dress was perfect; his linen absolute snow; the diamond studs in his shirt-front of the first water. He regarded Cotton with a curious look. Presently he said, speaking English with a slight alien accent—

“The trout are not numerous to-day. There is too much sunshine—too many real flies. But to fish and catch nothing is better than not to fish at all. It is the same all through the world. The poet, whom no one can read, has at least the pleasure of writing.”

Charles Cotton looked at the stranger with much interest. Not often did he encounter that most delightful product of human thought—a paradox. His surprised gaze was not lost on the stranger, obviously a humorist.

"Ha," he said, "let me apologise. I know that one should not speak to an English gentleman without an introduction. Thousand pardons. This is my card."

Thereon was printed: "*The Marquis de Castalcicala.*"

"I am not a gentleman," said Charles Cotton, "I am only a workman. It is a pleasure to me to talk with a gentleman."

"All gentlemen should also be workmen," said the Marquis, "and fishing is a gentle craft. Can you catch trout without gentles? But, my dear sir, I am one of those who do not think that gentlemen are all of one class. I am free, I fear; if so, forgive me; but your face shows you are a gentleman. There are so many like you in England; it makes the country great. I, alas! am an Italian; and we have gentlemanliness, and even manliness, crushed out of us by centuries of tyranny and Popery."

"I am very ignorant, sir," said Cotton, "all I know about Italy I have learnt from Byron's 'Childe Harold,' which I picked up at a bookstall one day, at Langford."

"You would not get an idea of Italy more perfectly," said the Marquis. "Your Byron understood us. The glory of Italy filled his veins. I think we

love him better than you do, for many small poets are named as competitors with him."

"I know nothing of the small poets of the day," said Cotton, "I live in a wilderness, and am, I fear, lamentably ignorant."

"You are too modest," said the Marquis. "A man who is well acquainted with the works of a great poet can hardly be called ignorant."

After taking a courteous leave of the fisherman the Marquis sauntered home to dinner. He was staying with the Squire, and greatly amused him and Cecilia with an account of his adventure with a philosophic angler. They speculated as to who he could be.

"A workman, he told me," quoth the Marquis, who was deftly treating a slice of pine with sugar and priceless port. "If you have many such workmen in these parts, you are felicitous. He spoke like a gentleman. He had a charming easy modesty about him. I wish we had such a breed of workers in Italy."

"They're a queer lot about here, thanks to that stupid man, Jenkins," said the Squire. "I shall be glad when I can get rid of that fellow. But I fancy the man the Marquis saw may have been that youngster who works for old Wrangel, and who often comes up here to do odd things. I've often

noticed him, and thought him better than the ordinary lot. At any rate, he does his work better than the others."

Cissy almost blushed. She had thought him *a great deal better* than the ordinary lot.

"Whoever he may be," said the Marquis de Castelcicala, "he is a most remarkable young man for his position in life, and I should predict for him a fortunate career. I think that his modesty was a rarer quality than his cleverness. He is one of those Englishmen of yours, born to make a name. No other nation breeds such men."

"You are apt to over-estimate us," said the Squire, "because by accident we have got a little ahead of other nations. But you also will come to the front by-and-by, and Italy will equal England again. You have always surpassed us in painting and sculpture, while in poetry Dante and Ariosto are almost equal to Shakespeare and Byron. How much we owe to you Shakespeare, and Milton, and Byron prove. I regard Italy as England's natural ally in all that is grand and good."

While the Squire and the Marquis were thus talking, where was the man who started the talk? Fishing quietly. It was a lovely evening. He stood beneath a noble ash tree, looking on the silver shimmer of water, and throwing his fly dexterously

into river ripples likely to tempt a trout. He knew the angling art as well as that earlier Charles Cotton, who was Isaak Walton's friend. Holdfast sat by him on his haunches, calmly surveying the river Engle, and gravely delighted when his master flung a trout ashore with a sudden curve of his wrist.

Alas, the calmest enjoyment hath its end. Those ruffians, Jenkins's scoundrels, Bates and Bond, came down to the river's side, and thought they had a good chance of accomplishing the fat fool's behest. Down they came, both overcome with beer. Charles Cotton was skilfully throwing his fly where he saw a trace of a trout, when he felt a hand on his collar. He happened to know how to use his elbows, a piece of knowledge sometimes more valuable than even the multiplication-table, and he quietly widened his shoulders. The fellow, Bates, who had taken him on the sly, lay on his back; Cotton caught him up, and threw him into the middle of the shallow stream, where he floundered miserably. But the other man, Bond, a big fellow of sixteen stone, thought he could easily put an end to so mere a stripling; so he rushed at him with vehement vigour, and was rather surprised to get "Long Melford" in upon his right temple. Charles Cotton had an idea of hitting straight from the shoulder.

All this time, Holdfast had been quiet. He

evidently had much confidence in his master. He looked on. Had unfair advantage been taken of Charles Cotton, Holdfast would quietly have fastened those splendid teeth of his into the calf of the assailant's leg. But he was an impartial dog; and as it appeared to him that his stalwart young master was quite a match for two such miserable duffers as Bond and Bates, he utterly disdained to interfere.

The rumour of this fracas reached Englehurst, where the Marquis de Castalcicala had kudized his riverside acquaintance. Truth was not told. It seldom is. But there was a general report that Cotton had drowned somebody. As a fact, nobody was drowned. Bates was washed, and there can be no doubt he wanted washing. Indeed, I am not at all certain that it would not be well for the School Boards to begin with that important W before commencing the three R's. If cleanliness be next to godliness, it must come before mere learning.

The failure of this unprovoked attack upon Charles Cotton made those who disliked him in the village all the angrier. And he was much disliked. Wrangel's three daughters disliked him because they could make no impression upon him. Jenkins and his parasites disliked him because he treated them

with manly contempt. When the two cowardly scoundrels who had attacked him sneaked back to the Five Horseshoes with a garbled account of their adventure, the bloated landlord at once thought he could carry out his revenge. He sent off to the nearest station of the county police a message to the effect that his man, Joe Bates, was in a very bad state through injuries received from Charles Cotton, and that it was doubtful whether he would recover.

Joe, meanwhile, was put to bed, looking much cleaner, and none the worse for his ducking.

Charles Cotton was playing a game of draughts with his Uncle Richard when a couple of policemen entered and took him into custody.

"Don't be frightened, uncle," said Charles. "You will find it will all come right. The fellow I ducked was born to be hanged, so I'll swear he can never be drowned."

So poor old Uncle Richard was left alone with no other consolation, and with the thought continually haunting him that "those horrid books" had done it all.

CHAPTER II.

THE HERO IN THE LOCK-UP.

“Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
This for a hermitage.”

JENKINS the huge was well pleased with the success of his scheme. Charles Cotton, whom he hated with the stolid hatred of ignorance, was locked up for that night at least, whatever else might happen to him.

“It will bring down the young blackguard’s pride,” roared Jenkins to his parasites of the bar that flattered the old fool for the sake of his salted beer. “He thinks himself half a gentleman. He won’t come here and drink a glass of good honest ale. Now he’s in the lock-up, the young humbug, and I hope they’ll give him three months. Poor Joe Bates won’t get over it for half a year, I venture to say.”

“That Cotton’s a bad lot,” said an old fellow called Spike, who made up Jenkins’s books for him, being a broken-down lawyer’s clerk.

"I don't approve of his conduct at all," remarked a rather affected female, who took the title of Mrs. Jenkins, though she had no definite claim to it.

So Charles Cotton got very prettily abused at the Five Horseshoes to-night; and the huge Jenkins, a man who always looked like a toad on his hind legs, waddled off to bed with the happy thought that Charles Cotton was confoundedly uncomfortable.

Strange to say, he was not. The locking up of a prisoner at Englehurst was a very primitive arrangement indeed. Radmore, the policeman, a stalwart Devonshire man, of six feet four, was married to a pretty little woman, who looked like a baby by his side. It had been a real love-match; for I can assure you, most courteous reader, there are love-matches in all grades of society. It is not absolutely necessary to be able to woo your sweetheart in canzonets, or give her little dinners at the Star and Garter at Richmond. Kissing is not an exclusively aristocratic amusement. However, the Englehurst policeman, Radmore, had as good a right to a romantic love affair as most men; for he was descended lineally from Tom Radmore, of Exeter, who ran away with Adela Courtenay, daughter of the Earl of Devon, in the sixteenth century. And our policeman had gone rather above the presumable level of

the police; for his pretty little blue-eyed fair-haired wife was a governess in the family of a Devonshire baronet; and tall Harry Radmore won her heart, though the baronet's eldest son was doing his best in the same direction.

Now the Englehurst lock-up, attached to Radmore's cottage, was a kind of fortified pig-stye. But the policeman had too much courtesy in his nature to shove Charles Cotton into this hole, good enough for thieves and scamps, so he asked him to have some supper with him, and put him in his own spare room. Mrs. Radmore gave him supper first, home-cured bacon and fresh eggs, and cider brought specially from the ripe apple-bearing core of Devon. After which Radmore smoked, and Charles Cotton and Nora Radmore played chess. Could only the flabby Jenkins have seen them! How indignant he would have been!

When Charles Cotton slipped between the sheets that night, he fell into a happy reverie. He thought much of his position. Since through that pane of glass he had watched the darling daughter of Englehurst a new dream had come into his life. An idea had stimulated his brain. Hitherto Charles Cotton's mind had lain dormant; but the thought of a noble and lofty love invigorated it, and he was ready at once for any conceivable adventure. The merry

chat of Mrs. Radmore over their chess had enlivened him. She respected Cotton for giving the half-imbecile wretch, Joe Bates, the first thorough washing he had ever had in his life. Clever women—no, that phrase won't do, for some women are too clever by half—but women with a magnetic sympathy can often discover in a young fellow a touch of genius before he has found it out for himself. Something of this kind occurred between Mrs. Radmore and Charles Cotton. He lay awake half the night thinking of their conversation, for she had developed his ideas, and caused him to reflect.

Came the morning in due time, and he snatched an hour or two of wholesome sleep. He did not feel particularly locked up when he looked out on Radmore's trim kitchen-garden. Radmore bragged that he could grow finer asparagus than Squire Englehurst's gardener; for he was only a Scotchman, don't you see? and Radmore came from Devon, where asparagus grows wild. Well, our friend Charles had his hearty homely breakfast, and then was marched up to Englehurst Hall, to be taken before the Squire. The court of justice was held in the library, where Cotton had no eyes for anything save that magic pane of glass, which seemed to let in a new light upon his existence. The macilent librarian acted as clerk. The Marquis de Castelcicala was

present, with an amused smile on his face. Cotton took things very quietly, knowing that he had only done what anyone would have done in such circumstances.

Jenkins the huge was there, with his unwashed half-attorney, Spike, and there was fine free swearing to the effect that Joe Bates had been vilely ill-treated. Bates was dying, Jenkins professed to think, and he didn't want to lose such a valuable servant. Charles Cotton began to think he ought to be hanged at least, if half these people said was true. He was thunderstruck when Squire Englehurst said—

“The case is dismissed. It is frivolous, worse than frivolous. One of your hangers-on, Jenkins, attacks this youngster when he is fishing, and gets a ducking for his pains. He deserved it. You deserve sharper treatment for encouraging idle scoundrels to get drunk at your house, and it shall not be my fault if you do not get what you deserve. Mr. Cotton, you did what was quite right, and I hope you will do just the same again if the occasion demands it. I am sorry you were locked up. Come and have some lunch with me.”

“I'm only a poor workman, Mr. Englehurst,” said Cotton. “I don't wish to be too forward because you are generous and kind.”

"Pshaw, lad," replied the Squire, "what of that? You're an Englishman, and speak Shakespeare's language. Come along. I don't believe in half the genealogies of the present day, and I daresay your blood is at least as good as mine."

So the late prisoner accompanied the magistrate to luncheon — a divine meal, with lobster salad, made with Devonshire cream, and pyramids of prawns, and ham of boar, and a mighty cold baron of ox, uncut, and marvellous contrivances in tartlets and jellies, with pineapple, Beechwood melon, and wondrous wines to our hero hitherto unknown.

And the daughter of Englehurst. Yes, there she was, and Titian was wanted to paint her. Who can put the blush roses of lovely cheeks, the ever varying lights of radiant eyes, the sweet soft graces of form, the music of a merry voice, into this prosaic black and white? Here's the deliciousest little girl in the world. What do I give you? Black ink on white paper.

She drove Charles Cotton wild that day. What was he, that he should think for an instant of Squire Englehurst's daughter? Yet . . . strange infatuation . . . the moment he saw her through that pane of glass he felt she was the only woman he could ever marry. Yet how could he, a mere

plumber and glazier, draw within admiring distance of the Squire's beautiful daughter? A manifest absurdity from the very first. Yet now he had actually lunched with her—had actually exchanged gay sayings with her—had seen a bright light in her eyes when he said something that pleased her—had held in his hand her little sweet warm pink shell of a hand. Might he dream of her? He tried.

The Marquis de Castalcicala looked on this little comedy with much interest. "These English," thought the aristocratic Italian, descendant of a most ancient race, "are altogether a curious people. Here is Squire Englehurst, as they call him—and I suppose the title of Squire means something or other—inviting a mere tradesman to sit at his table with himself, and his daughter . . . and *me*." That last monosyllable the Marquis soliloquized with a shudder.

As a fact, equality is better understood in England than anywhere else. There is a stronger strain of humanity in us, though the Republican nations boast of a fraternity which they cannot realise. There is no country where a patrician of the highest class would so easily encourage a brilliant plebeian. Moreover, in English society there is one crucial test. *Is he a gentleman?* A man may have a very small income, and few ancestors

to speak of, and yet exclusive English society will accept him if he has the unmistakeable touch. Sometimes society is even too easy, and admits men who are loud and vulgar—but they don't last. For success in the highest stratum of society, a man must dress well and talk well. The tailor business is easy enough, but to teach a man to talk you must teach him to think, and few things are more difficult. You must first teach him the elementary meanings of words.

And here I may pause to talk pedantically for a moment. I think that in modern national education we are missing the most important point. *Teach English.* Our language is worth learning. Few men can either speak or write it. I have compared it carefully with Greek, the most musical of languages, with Latin, the most logical, with German and French (this last being the best language in the world for memoirs and mathematics), and I arrive at the conclusion that no language can touch the English. Its metrical powers are not half developed yet; but we have three octaves—prose, blank verse, and rhyme—and no other nation has more than two.

To resume. Charles Cotton enjoyed his lunch. A youngster, he was in company difficult for a youngster to understand. Of the lady I say nothing,

since Balzac has acutely remarked that the first woman created puzzled her Creator. Never more original creature than Squire Englehurst's pretty daughter looked inquiringly on the surface of things—and she was an oddity, a regular little Tory of course, for she took her father's politics on trust. Yet she had that fine honest Liberalism of women which judges a man for what he *is*, not for what he *has*. It will be amusing if we should ever get female suffrage—a thing not impossible, since Disraeli has declared in its favour—to witness the result. Women—the educated portion of them at least—are socially Liberal, yet politically Tory. Their action in the House of Commons, if it should ever take place, will be almost revolutionary.

Charles Cotton, having been entertained at the table of the Squire with easy courtesy, and having had the delicious delight of listening to Miss Englehurst's merry speeches—airy nothings, all of them, though to him they sounded like the promises made by Aphrodite to Paris, on Mount Ida—took his leave with a grateful and excited feeling. Something in the same fashion felt Ixion when introduced to Olympus. Not every village workman can be brought into connection with every village Squire; for often the villager is wholly devoid of courtesy, and often the Squire (judging himself

superior to the multitude by reason of his possessions) treats men of a lower order with contempt. In the present case, a gentleman who thought more of mankind than of property, met with a working man who possessed the natural instincts of a gentleman; they immediately understood each other. As Cotton walked down the avenue, he felt as if he were flying in the air. This delightful episode in his life made a new man of him.

The Marquis de Castalcicala, a student of human character, thought he would have a quiet talk to this young fellow, who seemed to him a novelty. So, knowing his way through the Squire's grounds, he made a short cut, and joined Charles Cotton at the gate.

"I should like to walk through the village with you, Mr. Cotton," he said; "perhaps you could show me anything there is of interest."

"I am a poor guide," answered Cotton. "There are strange old houses here in Englehurst, but I am not clever enough to find out their history. People learned in that way would, I don't doubt. Now, there's the Five Horseshoes, which we shall see when we go round the corner of that great walnut tree; it is a very old house, but I have not been able to learn its history."

"Ah! that is where your large-looking friend lives," said the Marquis, laughing.

"I don't think he is a bad sort of fellow in some respects," said Cotton, "but he is by nature a bully, and can't take anything quietly. He thinks he may do just what he likes. He never goes to church, and sneers at the parson; he lives with a woman who is not his wife; he encourages poaching and thieving."

"Yes, I see; he defies public opinion. You breed such men in England, Mr. Cotton. They are of some use, these bullies. You would not be personified as John Bull but for such men. A few Jenkinsons here and there, who swear at the people above them, and kick the people below them, are not altogether useless. They are a part of that infinite variety of English life which is without parallel in any other country."

Charles Cotton, though an unusually clever young fellow, found it hard to follow the vivacious Marquis as closely as he would like. Reading and writing and thinking fast are just like working fast at the forge or the plough—they want practice.

The Marquis de Castalcicala and Charles Cotton turned the corner toward the Five Horseshoes. The fat landlord was sitting on the edge of the water-

trough in front of his inn, which would have been picturesque if he could have been eliminated. There he sat, a heavy dolt, who fell asleep in five minutes if there was no one to wake him; and there was a young woman whose relation to him was dubious, with false ringlets down to her waist. I sketch from absolute observation. I am not a Wilfrid Lawson, but I am certain, as was remarked in my first chapter, that much would be gained in morality if the dwellers in every parish could decide how many public-houses it should contain. It is my belief, after walking through the greater part of England, that nine-tenths of the public-houses are unnecessary. I am an advocate for a good glass of ale; but a good glass of ale is impossible where the public-houses are ten times the number they ought to be.

Jenkins, the stout and apoplectic, was lounging against his horse-trough, with dirty parasites around him. When he saw the Marquis and Cotton he began to shout. Shouting was his strong point. Stupidity and voice were about equal in quantity with him. So he shouted, from his horse-trough, some vile impertinence, with which I need not defile my virgin page, and the Marquis of Castelvilla, who had a cane in his hand, walked promptly to where the huge blackguard sat upon his horse-trough, and gave him a sharp cut across the face.

"Cochon!" he said.

Jenkins, taken by surprise, rushed forward wildly. The bully of the neighbourhood did not expect so stern a rebuke. But he had to meet Charles Cotton, who quickly interposed between him and the Marquis, and who, having a long and easy reach, disposed of the fat idiot in about a minute and a quarter. He sprawled on the ground, a miserable toad-like creature. Let us hope his woman folk consoled him that evening with an abundant supper of tripe and onions, or something equally suitable to his mental calibre.

"I suppose we shall both of us be summoned before the magistrates now," said the Marquis, laughing. "No matter, my young friend. I can afford to pay the fine, if a fine should be deemed necessary. Yet I suppose the law of England does not allow fellows like that to insult unoffending persons."

"The law is curious," said Cotton. "It does not allow you to punish an insolent person, and you can only check him by swearing that he puts you in bodily fear. Now the only fear you have is that his behaviour will put you in a rage and make you break the law."

"You fear yourself and not him," said the Mar-

quis. "Ah, but what is this?" he asked, pointing to a curious wooden erection, or rather series of erections, which stood under a prodigious elm-tree that overhung a deep pond, and were green with the moss and lichen that show disuse.

"Those are our great antiquities," said Cotton. "Englehurst Manor has some quaint customs, which have gone out of fashion now-a-day. There's the whipping-post for thieves and drunkards, and there are the stocks; and that thing slung on to a branch of the elm is what they call a ducking-stool. My uncle Richard remembers when they were all three used, and says he wishes they were used still."

"But the ducking-stool—what does that mean? What was it used for?"

"I never could quite make out what it meant," said Cotton to the Marquis, who was carefully inspecting the whole apparatus, which he had not noticed before, through his eyeglasses. "It was used, Uncle Richard says, for scolding women, and brewers who sold bad beer, and bakers whose bread was short weight. They were fastened into the stool, and then it was let down into the water several times."

"I quite approve that method of punishment," said the Marquis. "Why is it not now used? I know little of your English brewers and bakers, for

I never drink ale or eat bread; but I hear the women scold, and am sure that a cold bath would be of service to many of them."

Charles Cotton, who had heard Sarah and Jane and Emily Wrangel abuse each other when their father was out of hearing, quite agreed with the Marquis.

Meanwhile the landlord of the Five Horseshoes, fat and fatuous, was holding counsel with his affectionate relations and connexions. He groaned much, as well he might, having fallen heavily, with a blow which would have cracked any except the thickest skull in the county. Having been discomfited in his attempt to punish Cotton, he saw clearly that it would be useless to try the law against a foreign gentleman who was the Squire's guest.

"They're all alike, the damned Harrystockrats," he said, "the whole sanguinary gang will have to be shot down, or hung, and I wish old Garry would come and do it." By Garry he meant Garibaldi, whom, for some unintelligible reason, he regarded as the Coming Man, destined to deliver him from squires and excisemen.

Spike was there. "It ain't a bit of use to go before the magistrates," said that worthy. "We might take him to the County Court. Judge Mid-

dleton would give damages, for he's clean against gentlemen, and thinks they're always wrong."

"No good," groaned Jenkins, vexed with pain and rage. "I want to pay 'em in their own coin. You manage that for me, Spike, and I'll give you a fiver."

Spike reflected. He "happened to know" some very queer characters. He had been clerk to a lawyer who successfully defended thieves, often getting paid with the very bank-notes which they had stolen. Spike had been very intimate with one of his master's best clients, known to the fraternity as Slippery Jack, so often had he slipped out of prison, and out of the hands of the police. A happy idea occurred to him.

"It'll have to cost more than a fiver, Mr. Jenkins," he said; "but I can do what you want."

"Right you are!" exclaimed the vengeful Jenkins, with a gratified roar. "Do it, if it costs fifty." He emphasised his sentence by bringing down his hand upon the table with a mighty thump. Spike went down to the bar-parlour, and put on his horn-rimmed spectacles, and very slowly indited this epistle:

"8, 116, 17, 42, 1, 425, 28, 148, 26, 630, 22, 146, 20, 8, 174, 8, 398, 15, 193, 23, 76, 16, 1, 12."

And this he addressed to John Clark, at an address in the Seven Dials, and carefully posted it

himself. Having done this, and hearing on his return that his patron was asleep, he sat down with a happy mind to a long pipe and an earthenware mug of the wholesome ale for which the Five Horseshoes was famous.

CHAPTER III.

INVADERS.

"'Tis my delight, of a pitch-dark night,
When the rum has ceased to gurgle,
To make a hit with my centre-bit,
And show folk how I burgle."

THAT mysterious missive reached its destination, and was read in rather less time than it was written. Slippery Jack pondered over it with care, and soliloquized. He was in a back attic of Seven Dials, with a gin bottle on the table; and his attire was of the most ragged description. He had been out of luck lately, having been foiled by the police in two or three well-planned robberies, and he was now very eager for a chance to change his luck. Spike's letter seemed to let sunshine in to cheer his gloomy prospects.

"It'll do," he thought. "Spike's a trump. Diamonds, by George! I must take the Parson down."

He had just risen to go out when a slight scratching at the door served to tell him that there was a crony outside. He opened—to the Parson

himself. The contrast between the two men was curious. The new-comer had, to an eye not given to detect hypocrisy, a bland benevolent countenance. He was about six feet high; dressed in the costume of a dignitary of the Church, with a looped hat, and knee breeches and gaiters; a gold chain of massive size meandered across his waistcoat, and a single diamond of pure water sparkled on his hand. He looked at least an archdeacon. Yet his first act was to take up the gin bottle, and drink a vast draught from it without using the intermediate formality of a glass; and his next was to say—

“Well, Slip, old boy, anything up yet?”

“I was just coming over, Parson. You’re the very man for a capital job. Diamonds, down at Englehurst. Old Crake must find some money, and then we’ll start sharp. How shall I dress, now?”

“Get up as my servant, Slip. We’ll go to the best inn, and soon find out all about the blokes with the diamonds from the people about. It’s a capital bit of fun for this dull season. Let’s go to Crake’s.”

They went, but separately, being far too prudent to walk together. Inspector Shore might perchance be loitering that way, and catch a glimpse of them, and draw his own conclusions. The detective police

of London are admirably organised, as I have reason to know; but it is a curious fact that the thieves also have a detective force of their own, who watch the doings of the detectives.

Slippery Jack reached Crake's first, for the Parson walked with a dignified gravity which beseemed his position. Now Crake's establishment is modestly hidden down a court that turns out of the Strand—a court lying lower than the next street, so that in the street he has a front door, on what, in regard to the court, is the first floor. There is a brass plate on the street door, with the words, "MR. CRAKE, ACCOUNTANT," thereon engraved; but the door in the court is modestly silent as to the occupation of its owner. It was to the latter entrance that Slippery Jack came; but the Parson, with proper respectability, rang the bell in the street, and was admitted by a quiet man-servant, one of the astutest rogues in London, and, as a fact, Mr. Crake's junior partner.

Mr. Crake, a little broad-shouldered man, with a head disproportionately large for his body, sat at a table in a room on the lower floor of the house. All round this room were safes, such as you see in an ordinary lawyer's office, and on those safes were painted aristocratic names. On the wall hung a large photograph of Mr. Gladstone.

"Diamonds, eh?" he said in a hissing whisper, after scanning Spike's letter. "Yes; I know something of Spike; I could give him penal servitude if I liked. And you want money and a suit of clothes. Now, look here, Slip, do you promise to make a job of this?"

"Yes, Mr. Crake, I'm certain sure."

"Well, don't you make mistakes. Don't be in a hurry. Find out where the jewels are before you get in. Leave the plate alone, and on no account go near the wine cellar. Those confounded police nab so many of you because you can't resist a bottle of fizz; whereas, if you came off sober and quiet, why, isn't diamonds worth twenty dozen of the best Clicquot? If you break down in this, Slip, I won't interfere if they try to hang you."

"I'll do it, Mr. Crake."

"Very well; go into the other room and see if you can find a suit that will fit you. It ought to be black, and a cockade in the hat."

Slippery Jack went into a large room, where he had put on many a disguise, and where both male and female dresses of innumerable kinds hung from pegs on the walls, and soon reappeared, looking as irreproachable a rector's groom as you would find anywhere.

"You'll do," said Crake. "Here are twenty

couters. That will do for a week at the inn, and by that time you should have done something. Get off as soon as you can."

Crake, it will be seen, made Slippery Jack the leader of the expedition. The Parson, in truth, was ornamental. His career had been a strange one; he had gone to a public school and a university; but there was an inveterate antipathy to the eighth commandment implanted in his disposition. The worst of it was that he stole stupidly; and he would soon have come to utter grief if Crake, a Napoleon among thieves, had not seen his value and utilised him. The Parson always looked like a gentleman and talked like one. Indeed, poor fellow, he had once talked himself into the affections of a great heiress in the Midland Counties, but Crake would not let him marry her.

"No," he said, "I find you useful. If you try it on, I'll have you arrested on your wedding-day." And the parson, who, like most men of imposing appearance, was a thorough coward, gave in most humbly.

Crake was (among many rascalities) an organiser of jewel robberies. He had long since grasped the idea that this pays even better than being a stock-broker. Diamonds were his speciality. A diamond of ten carats is worth £200; a diamond of one hun-

dred carats is worth £20,000. Mr. Crake knew diamonds well; could tell the value of a stone at a glance. He had, at an early date, come to the conclusion that they were the best things to steal, being almost imponderable property. Settings melt down, and stones go to Amsterdam. A diamond is easily swallowed, if the thief is caught too promptly to be pleasant. Mr. Crake dwelt with the question mathematically, though I do not think he had ever been at Cambridge; but he was quite aware that the value of diamonds varies as the square of their weights, and that the square of the value of rubies varies as the cube of their weights. Alas, I remember breaking down terribly in a quadratic equation based on this fact. But the switching which came as corollary has indubitably fixed the law in my mind. Unluckily, it is not of much use to a fellow who is not a diamond dealer—or a Crake.

Slippery Jack and his comrade went straight away to the terminus, calling in at various queer public-houses that were usually in odd corners and blind alleys, and where a wink from landlord, or an ogle from barmaid, indicated recognition. The parson seemed a strange figure in such places; but in our mighty metropolis nothing, however strange, astonishes men. If you were to meet an omnibus drawn by an elephant you would merely recognise

a new idea. If a few M.P.s who can't speak English were marched off every day to a School Board School, every reader of the morning papers would be thankful, and willingly acquiesce in so wholesome a despotism. London magnetises the world, and nothing strange is strange in its marvellous streets. It has been said that France is a Monarchy, with a Republic for its Capital. It may be said that England, though a small island, is the capital of the world, and has a world for its capital. Years have passed since De Quincey spoke of the Nation of London: the World of London is now the true phrase.

Scrutton is the nearest railway station to Englehurst, and the trains that stop there are few; the district is not populous, and as to Squire Englehurst, when he does go to London (which is rarely) he sends horses on, and drives four in hand the whole way. The advent of a gentleman who clearly seemed a dignitary of the Church, attended by a servitor in black, with a cockade in his hat, was quite an event on the small village platform. The parson had travelled first-class, and the Slippery one third; and the latter took the charge of a respectable portmanteau, which looked as if it deserved the title of reverend, even if that prefix be denied to poor Mr. Keet. Joe Bates was at the station with

a trap from Jenkins's and a fast-trotting mare between the shafts. Away they drove along pleasant green lanes for about three miles, and then reached the Five Horseshoes at Englehurst. Here they were received with much respect by the orbicular Jenkins and the flaunting females of his establishment. The position of master and servant was maintained throughout by the two fellows; and Jenkins and his people, who did not understand this kind of thing, regarded the parson with reverence, as a clerical gentleman of distinction, who by some modern metaphysical method had reconciled the long-standing hostility between God and Mammon.

So the Parson, who called himself the Rev. Nicodemus Hodder, had a duck and green peas, with a considerable amount of spirits and water, in the parlour, in solitary dignity, while Slippery Jack was regaled with tripe and onions in the more social atmosphere of the bar. The stout landlord fell asleep; but there were a few farmers and gentlemen's servants there during the evening, and Miss Jane Jenkins, a freckled young woman with false ringlets reaching to her waist, did her best to be agreeable. The Slippery One was in his element. He told the most atrocious anecdotes of the aristocracy, and sang the most ridiculous songs of the Music Halls. He even awoke Jenkins at intervals, and he kept

the ringleted barmaid in a perpetual giggle. As to the farmers and footmen, they simply roared.

"Now you know," says the Slippery One, "you'd hardly believe it, but the Countess of Colchester said to me one day, 'Jack,' says she, 'if my old man dies, you're the young fellow I should fancy. You ain't handsome to speak of, but you're so devilish clever.' So says I, 'My lady, I'm much obligated, but I've made a prior promise to the Princess of Wales, in case H.R.H. should walk his chinks. Of course, I couldn't break my word to a lady; but I'll consider the question.' And I will, of course; only I must find out how much money she's got, that Countess."

"Nothing under twenty thousand a year would suit you, I suppose," said a quiet man with keen dark eyes, who was evidently a footman or valet.

"Well, I don't know. My hair's getting grey, and I'm not worth as much to the fair sex as I used to be. I think I might manage with ten thousand."

The farmers looked amazed. The quiet man smiled, and said,

"I wish you luck. Your master is a clergyman, I am told. Shall we get a sermon from him while he stays here?"

"I don't believe he ever preached in his life,"

said the Slippery One. "He's safe to be a bishop before he dies, but not because he preaches."

"Ah, because he doesn't preach, but lets great people go to Heaven—or somewhere else—without interfering," said the dark-eyed man. "He is wise. Never do your duty, and you are sure to succeed."

"Oh, that's your principle, is it?" said the Slippery One, with a sneer. "I used to learn something in the Catechism about doing your duty in your state of life. That's what I try to do."

"I hope we shall all follow your example," said the other, who evidently was in a mood for chaff. "We're not all perfect, though. Of course it's your duty to be, seeing you're a parson's servant."

Slippery Jack did not quite like being chaffed in this way. He did not know his man; and did not for a moment dream that his man knew him. But he did; and he took a malicious pleasure in saying things which the Slippery One would not like.

For this quiet personage, valet to the Marquis de Castelcicala, was one of the ablest detectives in Europe. The Marquis, though he seemed never to do anything, and fluttered from one country-house to another, was over here on a secret political mission. His valet was also an Italian; but he spoke

most of the languages of Europe with a perfect accent, and no one could have guessed his nationality. The company at the Five Horseshoes took him for an Englishman. Slippery Jack somehow felt uncomfortable in his presence, and would have felt a thousand times more uncomfortable had he guessed that he was known.

The time for closing came, and Redi, the Marquis's man, was one of the first to go.

"Who is that chap?" said Slippery Jack to Spike. "I don't like him much."

"Oh, he's only a servant to a foreign gent that's staying with Squire Englehurst. He's a stupid quiet sort of chap. He won't interfere with us, I'll swear."

"He'd better not. Can you and me have a quiet talk upstairs somewhere, Mr. Spike, over a drop of grog? I want to know one or two things. You understand."

Spike and Slippery Jack adjourned to a bedroom upstairs, where the latter was to sleep; there, with the aid of copious draughts of gin-and-water, they worked out their plot.

The Parson, meanwhile, had grown tired of his solitary dignity, and strolled out into the moonlight to smoke a cigar and look for adventures. But Englehurst was a very quiet little village indeed,

and but for the burly landlord of the Five Horse-shoes, might have been a model for villages. The girls did their work and went to bed early. There was no light in any casement when the Parson went on his stroll; and he came back disgusted just as Redi left the inn. That quick-sighted personage had a full view of him in the moonlight.

"I know that face," he thought, as he walked toward the Hall. "Who is the man? Dressed like an English priest, and down here at the same time as that villain Clark. It is strange; I must speak to the Marquis."

The Marquis de Castelcicala had gone to his own apartment when Redi returned. He gave his valet much liberty, for various reasons. This evening he was in a reverie, as he leaned back in the laziest of lounging chairs, his handsome dark eyes and abundant silky hair lighted by the lamps above him. He had been trying an experiment. It had never till lately occurred to him that he might possibly be a marrying man, some time or other. He had regarded women either as pretty toys, made to be played with and broken—or as useful pieces in that game of chess which is called politics. Women had amused him, and he had used women; but that he could, would, or should love a woman, had never struck him. So he was surprised when he found in

Cecilia Englehurst a something or other which he never had found elsewhere. He could not understand it. She was a charming simple-subtle child; he had seen thousands that would outdo her beauty and wit; yet there was some magic in her freshness which entranced him. And this evening he had thrown passion into his talk with her, had made his words significant, had tried to bring into an English drawing-room the rose-flushed atmosphere of moonlit Verona, before love was murdered in the tomb of all the Capulets. The Marquis had played his part well: his pretty English Juliet had responded, aptly and deftly; yet was he not quite satisfied.

"I suppose I am too old," he soliloquised. "Youth is the master-key that opens all locks. Pshaw, why should I dream of a mere girl? Am I not better free?"

He stood up, and looked at himself in the glass. Not a grey streak in the glossy brown hair. Not a darkening touch in the bright clear eye. You might go many leagues before seeing such a handsome gentleman as Castalcicala; and his face and form were the index of his mind. He was as brave and pure as Bayard—a *chevalier sans peur et sans reproche*.

His soliloquy was interrupted by a knock at the door, and Redi's entrance. That watchful valet came

to give his master information of his suspicion concerning the people he had noted at the Five Horse-shoes.

"They are London men," he said, "and thieves, I feel sure; and there have been so many jewel robberies in country houses that I am afraid they may think of trying Englehurst Hall."

"Where does Miss Englehurst keep her diamonds, Redi?" said the Marquis, laughing. "Do you really think these fellows mean mischief? If so, it would be amusing to set a trap for them. You must watch them, Redi; neither you nor I want much sleep; and there is all the day to sleep in when you want to use the night."

"They will do nothing to-night," said the valet; "they have not been here long enough, and they are not sober. But to-morrow night they are likely to try the experiment, and in the interval I may learn more."

"If you feel certain nothing will occur to-night you may take off my boots, Redi," said the Marquis. "And see what those fellows are about to-morrow. I believe them to be in some way associated with that stout landlord, who is evidently a stolid scoundrel. Just give me my dressing-gown, and see if you can find a little copy of Catullus that I have laid down somewhere. Thanks. Don't call me till eleven, un-

less you hear anything. In that case, wake me at once."

Redi, who well knew his master's humours, retired into the ante-room, where he slept.

Castelcicala did not go to bed. He lay back in a lounging chair, and read that great poem of the Veronese wherein are the hexameters—

Hespere, quis cœlo lucet crudelior ignis?
Hespere, quis cœlo lucet jucundior ignis.

"Ah," said the Marquis to himself, for he had a habit of soliloquy, "that man was a model of the gentlemanly poet. The star of eventide, cruel yet jocund to the tender bride, is a charming notion. That philosophic prosaic metre-manufacturing Horace, who was evidently born to be quoted in the English House of Commons, had no such pure poetry about him."

The Marquis disliked the English House of Commons, and regarded representative government as absurd. He was an oligarch. Now, although we firmly believe in our Commons, and laugh at the Prince Consort's remark that representative government is on its trial, we must confess that our method of management is rather odd. The First Lord of the Treasury is for the time Dictator of this pseudo-monarchic Commonwealth of England. But,

and this is a very momentous element in the question, we hold to Royalty. Perhaps few things are more worthy of note than the way in which John Bright, a typical Englishman in his love for individual freedom, holds to Royalty. It looks as if the nation wanted a personal leader. Did the great King Alfred, just a thousand years ago, impinge upon us that tendency; or is it that since the English came from their earliest home in Asia they have always loved a *Herr*, a *Vir*, a *Hero* to follow—a man who gathered up into himself the infinite possibilities of his followers, and said—

“As I am, so is my army: the meanest man in my army shall be as brave and strong as I.”

The Marquis had been dreaming over his Catullus for some time in that happy way in which those who comprehend true poetry study it over and over again—aware that in the highest form of verse a misplaced vowel is murder—when he heard a tapping at the window of his room.

“Owls,” he thought placidly, and returned to his Catullus, and read, for the myriadth time, the mighty galliambics which Mr. Tennyson, trying to imitate, has shown that he cannot scan.

But it was not owls. Owls, indeed, though they can make a noise if they like, are retiring birds, and behave in a respectable manner. I have for some

years had the honour of knowing a pair of owls that were brought to me from the nest, and their behaviour is perfect. They don't even swear when dinner is late, which cannot be said of some human beings. Their worst failing is that they hoot very much when the love-passion troubles them; but it has been observed that in a similar state of affairs human creatures write vile verse, a worse crime by far.

The Marquis continued his reading, noticing with delight the way in which the most learned, yet the most passionate, of poets put the choicest of words into his verse, and setting his own gems (not another man's) in gold of his own mintage. To understand the supreme beauty of high poetry is next best to the power of producing it. And few things in literature are so curious as the power of a man to use the very best words in the very best order when he evidently is frightfully in earnest. Whether wooing Lesbia or lampooning Cæsar, he meant what he said; yet the lines that languish with love, and the lines that cut like the rapier, are equally perfect in their music.

The tapping continued.

"Is it an owl?" soliloquised the Marquis. "If so, he is very pertinacious. Let us go and see."

Thus thinking, he put down his book, and, open-

ing the window, beheld a human head. He was not startled, being much of Lord Lyndhurst's opinion, that in these days it is absurd to be surprised at anything. Moreover, he saw in a moment that his unexpected visitor was Charles Cotton, who had reached the only lighted window in the house by clinging to a huge Virginia creeper. The Marquis helped him into the room, saying, with a laugh,

"I have had many strange visitors, but you are the strangest I remember. Have you come to the right room, or did you think to play Romeo to Miss Englehurst's Juliet?"

"It is the only lighted window in the house, and I felt sure it was yours, since no one else would be likely to sit up so late. I want to tell you something which I think important. I was sitting on a stile, thinking about nothing particular, when two men came by. The night is pitch dark; they did not see me. I remember most of their talk.

"'We told that fool *to-morrow*, but we'll do it *to-night*,' said one, a biggish man, 'and be off with the swag before he's awake.'

"'Right you are, sir. The girl has got a lot of diamonds in a casket—stunners—that would sell for no end of money in Amsterdam. I tipped one of the boys half a quid, and he told me all about it. We'll just walk quietly in through the window, nab

that box, and walk our chinks. Don't see why old Jenkins should have any share of the plunder. We'll be there about two o'clock, and get off with the swag by road. The rail's dangerous.' "

The Marquis laughed quietly, as Charles Cotton dramatically repeated this colloquy. Then he looked at his watch, and said:—

"It is just one. We have an hour to consider the right thing to do. You and I are more than a match for those two burglars, but perhaps my man Redi had better help, in case of their escape in the darkness. Sit down awhile, and I will think what is best to be done."

The Marquis reflected, then struck a silver bell, and in two minutes Redi entered, and received his instructions.

"Now," said Castelvicala, with a gay smile, "comes my greatest difficulty. I must go and talk to a young lady in bed. Follow me silently."

They trod quietly along the Turkey-carpeted corridor. The Marquis tried Cecilia's door, and found it unlocked. Why should any trustful innocent child lock her door in her father's house? The Marquis sat by her bedside, and watched her soft sweet breath, and felt half afraid to awake her. But time was going on, and the necessity grew imperious.

"She is fast asleep," he said to Redi and Cotton,

who were standing just outside. "You stay quite quietly here with me, Cotton, in case they come before Redi can manage to wake the Squire, and we'll not wake Miss Englehurst till we hear what the Squire says. We must not let them see a light—it will frighten them away."

CHAPTER IV.

CAUGHT IN A TRAP.

"If ever the devil forsakes his own,
'Tis because their place is ready."

Old Song.

"Go to the Squire, Redi," whispered the Marquis; "wake him quietly. Tell him what I have done, and why, and ask him not to call up any of the servants. A lot of men about are sure to alarm the robbers. Ask him to come at once."

At once! The Squire, who loved his after dinner port, slept the sleep of a fine old English gentleman. But when Redi did at last contrive to make him understand the situation, he sprang out of bed on the instant, pulled on his breeches, seized a heavy gold-headed riding whip, and was at Cissy's bedside in less time than could easily be imagined.

The Marquis could whisper articulately, a rare and often valued art. He made the Squire understand in a few words that he had ventured on this rather irregular movement of defence, because he was in immediate expectation of the attack.

"If you leave these scoundrels to me," he said, "I feel certain we shall take them. Will you see Miss Englehurst to a safe corner?"

The Squire assented, but grasped his heavy whip with grim resolve to interfere with a vengeance if there should be need. Pretty Cis was awakened by her father and carried by him to his own bed. He explained the matter to her as briefly as possible, and assured her there was nothing to fear. It was unlucky for Jenkins's plan of revenge that his intense sleepiness caused him to leave these two London miscreants to Spike. That worthy had promised his patron that the burglars should inflict some injury on the Marquis, who was sure to be about, as he was known to sit up late; indeed, the Englehurst villagers were so amazed by this Italian gentleman's eccentric habits, that he was commonly reported to have dealings with the Devil. He was seen wandering in the lonely fields at all hours; the light burnt always in his window, for he "outwatched the Bear;" it was said that sometimes two forms might be seen crossing swords at midnight, throwing their shadows on the blinds, and that it was the Marquis fighting the Devil for his soul. As a fact, Castelvicala would often have a fencing bout with Redi, to give him a breathing just before he slept. Both were masters of fence, an art which Englishmen neglect. Apart

from its beauty and grace, the use of the rapier steadies and strengthens every muscle of the body. It gives strength to the lungs, power to the wrist, and quickness to the eye. It is the favourite pastime of men of genius. An old friend of mine once went, in his boyhood, with his father, to a Brighton fencing gallery. Two men were fencing, one, he said, of wonderful beauty, but a little lame; the other quick as lightning in his movements, with a face that did not seem the same two instants together. My friend got a sharp pinch from his father, which seems to have been his friendly paternal way of bidding him take notice when it was not suitable to speak. He *did* take notice, and learned, on leaving the gallery, that he had seen Byron cross rapiers with Edmund Kean—our first poet since Shakespeare with our first actor since Garrick.

When Spike came to consider the matter, he thought what he had undertaken too dangerous; so, very glad that Jenkins was sunken in somnolence, he instructed the villains as to little Cecilia's diamonds, but said no word about the Marquis. There was just a chance, he argued with himself, that they might meet the Marquis and maul him. If so, well; if not, he could tell Jenkins they had been told to do it: for, whether they got the diamonds or not, they would certainly be off next day, so could not

contradict him. And Jenkins would naturally deem the loss of a few thousand pounds' worth of diamonds a heavy blow to the Squire, whom he hated "as the devil hates holy water." So Spike, forgetting the canon that there is honour among thieves, sent the fellows off with instructions as to the diamonds only.

Meanwhile Redi had taken his post at the open window, and the three watchers were still as if they slept. It was a breathless night. Scent of roses and honey-suckle, and a thousand rarer flowers, was heavy in the air. It was silent; except that once a nightingale dashed into maddening throbs of song . . . then suddenly broke off, with a startled cry.

"That means they are here," whispered the Marquis, just audibly. "Ready!"

Yes, there were muffled steps beneath the window. There were low whispers as the "cracksmen" reconnoitred. The old growth of wistaria made as easy a ladder to Miss Englehurst's room as to the Marquis's; and to Slippery Jack the position looked feasible enough.

"I can do it, Parson," he said. "When I'm in through the window, just haul yourself up high enough for me to hand you down the box. Understand?"

"All right," he said.

"I may be a bit of time finding the box," said the Slippery One. "Besides, whatever Crake says, I shall just look to see whether the young lady's left her purse or watch about."

"Don't hurt the young lady if she wakes," says the considerate Parson.

"Lord bless her pretty heart! I never hurt a lady in the whole course of my profession."

This whispered chaff amused the Marquis much. The Slippery One climbed up the creeper like a cat, and got dexterously through the window—to find his legs caught by Cotton, his throat clutched by the Marquis, while Redi clapped a square of plaster on his mouth, so that he could not utter a sound. Finding he was caught in a trap, he made no resistance. In two minutes he was bound hand and foot, a safe prisoner in Redi's room. All the while the Squire was in a state of excitement, wanting to help in the operations.

"How about the other man, Redi?" said the Marquis.

"I can take him, Excellency."

"Don't let him slip now."

Redi didn't. The Marquis and Cotton watched from the window above. The active Italian darted round a corner, grasped the Parson, who was gazing

stolidly at Miss Englehurst's window, and led him off like a lamb. The villanous dolt collapsed at once. In a few minutes he was carefully pinioned beside his companion.

"Well done!" said the Squire. "The whole thing has been well done. I thank you, Castelcicala, though I did think it a bold measure to take possession of my little girl's room. What will she say to you to-morrow, I wonder?"

"I hope she will not be very cruel," he answered. "We shall see. I took it to be a question of time. The diamonds might have slipped away before you could have come."

The Squire laughed heartily.

"They would have got little. All the village fancies that my Cis keeps thousands of pounds' worth of diamonds in her jewel-case. I don't think there are ten pounds' worth. She has got a nice lot of diamonds, which I let her wear on great occasions, just to gratify her pretty vanity; but they're in an iron safe let into the wall at the back of my bed, and I pity the scoundrels who come to try it."

The Squire grasped his dog-whip with a strong hand as he spoke, and there was a flash in his eye which showed he meant what he said. He would have given a good account of any burglars who had reached his bedside.

After a sudden excitement it is difficult to sleep. The heroine of the night was far away in the charmed forests of Dreamland, peopled with forms more beautiful than those portrayed by Boccaccio; but her rescuers found repose as impossible as did the unhappy prisoners, Slippery Jack and the Parson, comfortably pinioned in Redi's room. The Parson passed the night in swearing at his "pal" for leading him into such a scrape; while the Slippery One's anguish was envenomed by the fact that the plaster with which Redi had pitilessly silenced him still remained, and he could not hurl fiercer oaths at his companion in misery.

"We have murdered sleep," said the Squire. "Let us go to the library and have a supper-breakfast. Your man knows the way to the larder and cellar, Marquis."

Redi showed his possession of this valuable knowledge by quickly placing on a table in a corner of the large library two or three cold joints, with champagne, sherry, claret, and the Squire's famous old home-brewed ale. Of this Mr. Englehurst took a noble gulp, and then set to work to cut himself cold round of beef, as tender as a filbert kernel. A fine type of John Bull he looked, wearing only his shirt and breeches, and consuming with a noble appetite the staple food of England, beef and beer.

"What will be done with these burglars?" asked the Marquis, who was contenting himself with biscuits and champagne, which he had chosen to drink because he thought Charles Cotton would be profited by a glass or two.

"They'll be committed for trial, sent to the assizes, get five years, come out on a ticket of leave, and be diamond-hunting again in a day or two. Tie the rogues up and flog them and send them off, I say. Flogging should be the punishment for a first offence in almost all cases. They don't like it. So you send a boy into a prison, which is a Thieves' University, and he comes out a thief complete. A flogging would have cured him. 'O, flogging brutalises,' cry the rose-water people. Does it, really? A good many fine fellows have been flogged at Eton and elsewhere without being brutalised. I believe crime might be stamped out if people were not so idiotically humane."

"Yes," said the Marquis, "they regard the murderer as the unfortunate victim of an irresistible impulse, while the murdered man gets no sympathy. Why did he stand in the way of an irresistible impulse?"

The flow of talk went on. Charles Cotton listened. It was not modesty alone that kept him silent. He was thinking that now he had entered

the mystic chamber of the lady whom he had watched through that magic pane of glass. Strange privilege! thus to invade the sweet sanctity of a maiden's bower, while her fair head lay on the pillow, and her eyelids drooped in dreams. He thought too much of that wondrous moment to follow clearly the talk of the Squire and the Marquis. He said no word.

The first rays of sunlight came aslant upon the lawns. Starlings in the old hall chimney begin to talk very wisely, if one only knew their language. Yes, there's the lark. Earth's matin cry of joy for the coming of the sun.

Dawn!

It dawns on the Squire that his costume is careless. It dawns on the Marquis that it would be well to bathe and dress. It dawns on Charles Cotton that a dip in the river Engle would do him a power of good. So the supper-breakfast ended, and Cotton goes down to a fine deep pool, and strips, and takes his header, and is home in time for breakfast with his pious uncle—of which meal, for obvious reasons, he eats not much. His uncle Richard asks him, with the longest of sanctimonious faces, why he eats no breakfast, and the wicked youngster replies—

"Why, uncle, I've no appetite. I've only just finished supper with the Squire."

The Plymouth Brother collapsed. He had his own private opinion of the Squire's fate in the next world; but in this world he admitted his supremacy. As Coleridge once remarked, worldliness is bad, but other-worldliness is worse.

There was much anxiety at the Five Horseshoes that morning. In case of either success or failure, the Slippery One and the Parson had promised that Spike should have a message. Spike got no message. Jenkins, impatient and afraid of what might happen, used strong language to Spike. The flaunting females of the establishment had a bad time of it. When Jenkins was in a bad temper the neighbourhood knew it. He bellowed his passion. He was now atrociously angry, fearing that his scheme might have failed, and that he might be in danger. Spike, puzzled at having no news, conscious of having betrayed his patron, was not at all happy in his mind.

Let us return to the Hall. Let us welcome sweet Cecilia to the breakfast room, after her perilous unique adventure. She comes in blushing, like the sweetest of roses. She kisses her father, who coolly says,

"I hope you slept well, Cis?"

There are tears in her pretty eyes as she takes the Marquis's hand, for she knows he has dared everything to save her from danger. And when she sits down she finds among her letters one in a quaint caligraphy, running thus:—

“Strange figures in the silent gloom!

Now what is this

That brings such guardians to the room

Of charming Cis?

The stars burn bright, the sky sinks blue,

The lulled leaves kiss;

Far in the world of dreams are you,

Most lovely Cis!

Into the farthest regions stray:

For nought amiss

Shall trouble you, by night or day,

Gay-hearted Cis.

By day or night, to play or fight,

O take thou this!

One is your perfect, constant knight,

Sweet Lady Cis!”

She read it through. She did not quite understand it. The quaint turns of a poetry, half Italian, half English, naturally puzzled a little girl like Cecilia. She thought she would read it again, and again, and again, and try to make out what it meant, after she had read the various letters (all crossed) from her female correspondents. Having made this resolve, she suddenly looked up with a gay smile,

and met the Marquis de Castelcicala's eyes, full of fun and fire. Young Cotton, the glazier, haunted by the vision which he had beheld through a pane of glass, will surely have no chance against this poetic Italian noble, if he is in real earnest. Hard to say. *Souvent femme varie.*

Old Wrangel sneered savagely at Cotton that morning.

"So you've turned thief-taker up at the Hall, have you?" he said. "Hadn't ye better give up the honest glazier's diamond, and join them detectives up in London? What call have you up at the Squire's, I should like to know?"

Cotton seldom bandied words with his cantankerous master; but on this occasion he said,

"I'm proud of my trade, and I wouldn't be a regular thief-taker; but when I happen to hear men plotting a robbery, it's my duty to stop it. You'd have done the same, I'll swear."

"Maybe I might, boy," said Wrangel, somewhat mollified. "You're a good workman, Charlie, but don't you get misled by the gentry's being kind to you. They take up with a lad that's brisk and good-looking, but they soon get tired of him, and then, mayhap, he's spoilt for his proper honest work, and goes all to the bad."

"The Squire is not like that," said Cotton, "and I hope I am not."

"The Squire's the Squire. A man must be a fool and a rogue to say anything against him in Englehurst. As to you, wait till you're tried. Now, I want you to go over to Scudamore, and do something to that new man, Laing's conservatory. I don't rightly know from his letter what he wants, and I wish he'd pay his bill before he gives me any more orders; but you may as well take some glass and go over."

Cotton shouldered his glass and walked off blithely. A glazier thus occupied is just as fine a sight (although ignorant people cannot see it) as a cavalry soldier riding along with the pennon fluttering at his lance point, as a hunting man in scarlet flying over a sunk fence. Each is in his own avocation, and each avocation has its own nobility. Still the man who gives light to our houses has some claim to rank beside the man who kills our foes or our foxes.

For the inventor of glass was no common benefactor of mankind. What would the *gourmet* be without his elegant decanters and thin-blown glasses, the chemist without his retorts and pipettes, the astronomer without lens and speculum, Beauty without her mirror, Age without its spectacles? Health and science are both indebted to the manipulator

of glass. What our ancestors, up to the fourteenth century, did without glass windows, passes my apprehension. Such of my readers as remember Pitt's window tax, which was really a tax on light and air, will agree with me as to the uses of glass.

Charles Cotton, however, as he walked gaily along the high road, was not reflecting upon glass. He was thinking over his relations with the Squire, and Wrangel's remarks thereon. He saw clearly that England is a land of class and caste, but he had not sufficient knowledge, either of history or contemporary life, to understand the way in which society in this country is always changing its aspect. The movement of English life, from the time when Wessex became England, is continuous, and the political students who begin their history from the Conquest, or Magna Charta, or the Reformation, or the Commonwealth, might just as well begin it from the Reform Act of 1832, or the Repeal of the Corn Laws.

Cotton strode along, trying, with a restless imagination, to realise the world beyond the limits of his own experience—a thing impossible! Before he had, through that magic pane of glass, beheld Cecilia among her roses, herself more pure and fragrant than any rose that bloomed beneath the eyes of Eve in the garden of primeval peace, he

had dreamt of going to London and working his own way upward. But now the foolish youth, madly magnetised by an impossibility, feeling what Shelley calls "the desire of the moth for the star," dreaded the thought of leaving Englehurst. So, as he tramped away, heartily wishing it was not the dusty high road he had to traverse, but fieldpath or lane, he meditated on his uncertain future,

"And found no end, in wandering mazes lost."

Suddenly the sound of a horn smote his ear. Looking round, he saw a four-horse coach coming merrily along, with a good roof load of passengers. It was a new enterprise in those parts. Mr. Stanley Gay, a gentleman who, like the veteran, Mr. Reynardson, took to coaching for the love of it, had just started a coach between two of the principal towns in the neighbourhood, taking Englehurst in the way.

"Now then, glazier," he cried, in a cheery voice, "up with you behind, and don't smash your windows. I'll take you on free, gratis, for nothing. Where do you want to stop?"

"At Scudamore, sir," said Cotton, who slung himself up to the hind seat without a smash.

"All right! I like to make my coach look respectable."

He touched the near side leader under the bar, and away they went at a spanking pace. Cotton found all the cobwebs blown out of his brain by the rapid movement, while Mr. Gay's humorous remarks to the passers-by, and the jubilant music of the guard's horn, made him feel as if life had a stir in it which he had never yet known.

Cotton was set down at the gate of Scudamore Lodge, glass all safe. Mr. Laing, who had lately taken the house in question, was quite unknown to the neighbourhood, a circumstance sufficient to cause mysterious rumours to be circulated to his detriment. He had that high off-hand manner which your parvenu imagines to be truly aristocratic. Some people are egotists, and doubtless this Laing had a considerable belief in himself; but, if one may coin an awkward word, he was a *meumist*. He evidently believed, like the Laureate's Northern Farmer, in "Proputty." It was *my* house with him, *my* conservatory (*greenhouse* was too small), *my* carriages, *my* wife, *my* daughter. For he had a wife and daughter, and the wife had always meekly acquiesced in being treated as a chattel; but Mr. Laing's daughter, when she came well into her teens, declined to accept the situation. Mr. Laing, like many of the more aggressive members of the human race, was a short man, with a dignified ap-

pearance, who wore gold-rimmed eye-glasses, through which he examined people superciliously, and who always looked as if he had just stepped from a band-box. His daughter, by some hereditary anomaly which I leave to the Darwinists, shot up at seventeen to about five feet eight, and looked as gawky and awkward as a girl could well look. Mr. Laing was disgusted at having to look up at "*my* daughter;" disgusted also that this young lady laughed at his rights of ownership, and would have her own way. He would have locked her up, castigated her, kept her on bread and water, had he dared; but the young hoyden laughed at him, and *my* daughter was her own mistress.

Leaving Charles Cotton with his shelf of glass to meet and take instructions from the self-important Mr. Laing, I return for a moment to Wrangel's. Not long after Cotton had left, Redi came down in a hurry to say that he was wanted at the Hall. Old Wrangel was in a surly mood, and became surlier when this message came.

"Cotton's gone away to do a day's work," he said. "If the Squire's always wanting him, the Squire 'll have to pay his wages."

"Pooh, pooh, man," said Redi, "don't talk insolently of Mr. Englehurst. Where is Cotton gone?"

"You may find out for yourself," said Wrangel, "I'm busy."

And he resumed his work at the bench in stolid silence. Redi went away in disgust. There were reasons for wanting Charles Cotton.

For, when a rather protracted breakfast at the Hall had come to an end, it was resolved to adjourn and examine the burglars, with a view to their committal. Redi and a couple of footmen went to fetch them. They found that their cords had been cut—behind, as they could not themselves have cut them—and that they were clean gone!

And, at the very moment of this discovery, a housemaid came shrieking along the corridor that the Squire's room had been robbed. It was so. That safe by his bedside, which he had boasted of but yesterday, had been opened with perfect ease, as if the robber had used the Squire's own key—and of its priceless contents there was nothing left.

There were telegrams and messages in all directions of course; and among the rest Redi was sent for Charles Cotton.

CHAPTER V.

CHARLES COTTON'S TRIALS.

"He saw a cottage with a double coach-house,
 A cottage of gentility;
 And the devil did grin, for his darling sin
 Is pride that apes humility."

SOUTHEY.

MR. LAING, a gentleman who had accumulated money no one exactly knew how, and who, though money seemed plentiful with him, took longer credit than the country tradesfolks liked, habituated as they were to Squire Englehurst's system of paying on quarter-day sharp, and making anyone who did not come on quarterday wait till next quarter (wherein he imitated the Duke of Wellington), was one of those town-bred people who cannot understand English country life. Great towns are great necessities, but also they are great nuisances. Alexander Smith says (I quote from memory):—

" in crowded towns
 The stars are nearer to us than the fields."

On this poetic text 'twere easy to preach a

sermon. Great agglomerations of men lead to splendid results; famous towns are famous things. Yet how many, "in populous city pent," must pine for closer intercourse with nature! I always deem there is deep significance in the myth of the giant Antaeus, who fought with the demi-god Hercules. When Hercules could lift him from the ground, he was too much for him. When Antaeus again touched his mother earth, he got new vigour. Does not Hercules symbolise the antagonist destiny against which every man of us has to strive? Are we not freshened for the unequal fight when, like Antaeus, we seek the bosom of our generous Mother, and drink the wine of winds, and cool our wearied eyes with the emerald woods, and suffer the laughing river to rock our cradle of a boat? The lovingness of all wild creatures is delightful to the man who has to live in an atmosphere of suspicion. The robin perches on my knee or my table, as I scribble on the lawn; the nightingale sings, close to my open window, a happy serenade; it is hard to believe that flowers and trees do not recognise those who love them.

"And 'tis my faith, that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes,"

says Wordsworth; and I am very much of the same faith.

Mr. Laing did not take Scudamore Lodge with any of these ultra-sentimental notions, at which no one than myself is more ready to laugh when there is east wind and snow falling thick. He came to Scudamore Lodge to be — a country gentleman. Horrific idea! If there is any English manufacture that requires *time*, it is your country gentleman. You may make a millionaire in a year; you may make old port in a week; but a country gentleman is like an oak—he wants centuries. It is odd what a lot of men come to live in the country now, not because they love it, but because they want to take rank with the county families. Invariably they fail; and, after exhibiting their unsurpassable equipages for a year or two, they go somewhere else to learn the same lesson over again. The old-fashioned country gentleman has no pride about him, but he does not care to know new people. He has his own set—old friends with old houses, and old ideas, and old grievances. Yes, and old port. Can you expect him to be more than coolly civil to the new man who comes into the neighbourhood with plenty of money and no introductions? It is absurd. Surely the new comer ought to have a society of his own. Why in the world should any Englishman want to force himself among people who don't want him? There are so many strata of vivid intellectual society

in this England of ours, now that the minds of all classes are touched by the stimulus of thought, that it is possible to meet real social capacity in places where hitherto it was undreamt of. We are a malleable people—a golden race; and the homogeneous character of a nation welded into one from such heterogeneous tribes is the most remarkable phenomenon in anthropology.

“Goodness me! get on with your story, and don’t use such long words,” says a fair reader. Duly obedient, I proceed to say that Mr. Laing did not come to Scudamore Lodge to enjoy nature under the guidance of Wordsworth, Shelley, and Ruskin. He came with the notion that he should be a country gentleman in a moderate way, and possibly find a spouse with title and estate for his daughter Amelia. He was very tired of *my* daughter. He had been obeyed all his life, and now his only child was a rebel. Amelia, though a dull girl, had a clear instinct, and saw that her father was a humbug. This led to her decisive rebellion. She saw her mother treated as if she were a slave; she had herself been frightened into a sad subjection by harsh words and harsher blows. When she felt her strength she amazed her father by turning upon him and attempting to defend her mother from his outbreaks of ill-temper. Being a mere child, she was amazed

to find that her mother was intensely angry with her for interfering. There is a magic in marriage even when it is an incomplete marriage, like that of Laing and his wife; and the woman who is bullied by a cur will turn on her son or on her daughter for daring to interfere.

When Cotton, landed from Stanley Gay's four-in-hand, walked up the back pathway towards the house, he was full of amused thought. It was to him an unknown thing to be behind four horses. The man who remembers His Majesty's mail in its prime, who mayhap has taken the ribbons from Oxford to London, may feel a just superiority over modern members of the Road Club and its kindred societies. Ten and a half miles all through, changes included, meant eleven miles on ordinary ground, and twelve wherever the horses could gallop. The contemporary amateur of the ribbons has no such strenuous work: eight miles is for him a fair pace; but even that, with a team that does not break, is a very enjoyable thing. Cotton had enjoyed it, and now walked up to Mr. Laing's back entrance in a very pleasant humour.

Which humour was soon changed. Laing was in his angriest mood. These cross-grained fellows are usually sufferers from hepatic disease, and are

very dependent on what they eat and drink. Through the shortcoming of butcher and cook Laing's lunch had been spoilt; he immediately revenged himself on his unoffending wife, who certainly could not make a country butcher's cutlet tender, or a plain cook's sauce piquante contain any piquancy.

"Really," he said, "this is too bad. I never get a tolerable meal now. Look at this," he said, almost in tears, exhibiting on his fork what looked like a clever imitation of a cutlet done in leather. "I am expected to eat this—to flourish on this—to be happy on this! I should be better off if, instead of keeping up a country gentleman's household, I were to go and live at an hotel."

"I'm sure I wish you would, Papa," said Miss Amelia. "Mamma and I would be much happier without you."

"You wicked girl!" shrieked Mrs. Laing, "I would not be separated from your dear Papa on any account. You are ungrateful for the blessings you receive. Why don't you kneel down and beg his pardon at once?"

"Beg his pardon! I should like to see him beg yours, Mamma, for his cruelty to you." And there-with the precocious little vixen flung out through the open window and was gone.

Mr. Laing covered his face with a white and strongly scented pocket-handkerchief, and remained silent. His wife watched him anxiously. Although he made her life utterly unhappy, she thought him the best of men, from the one Adam who had infinite elbow room, yet contrived to get into a mess, down to the innumerable crowd of poets, philosophers, politicians, millionaires, paupers, English, Irish, European, Africans, Brahmans, Pariahs, Patagonians, Heathen Chinese, who would much astonish our great forefather. I can imagine him looking at the countless multitude, and decidedly declining to believe that he begot them all. Poor dear old Adam! that original sin of his has been too severely punished, now that he has become the progenitor of an uncountable series of unoriginal sinners.

By-and-by Laing removed his scented handkerchief, and resumed—and as he could not revenge himself on his daughter, he pitched into his wife.

“You have spoilt that girl,” he said. “She is a regular tomboy, vulgar and insolent. I am ashamed to think of her as a daughter of mine. I shall send her to school; there is one at Tunbridge Wells, where they advertise strict discipline for unruly girls. That’s the place for her. I am tired of getting her into order. She makes my life wretched; and I came

down here to enjoy the beauties of nature and the quietude of the country."

In this mood, half lachrymose, half passionate, Mr. Laing went out and encountered his glazier, and he gave his orders in so snarling surly a way that Charles Cotton was intensely amused. He was of too calm a temperament to take offence at Laing's mode of talk. He went to work with a will, making the many alterations which the master of the house required. Laing found that he could not find fault with him, for Cotton knew his business and did it. So, when he had shown him what was needed, and made a series of absurd suggestions, which Cotton did not notice, he turned to pursue his favourite amusement—worrying his wife.

"Damned young fool of a glazier that fellow Wrangel has sent over!" he said to her. "One of those opinionated fellows who think they know everything. I've done my best to set him right: but I am afraid I shan't get my work properly done. Dear me, how these things fatigue me! Give me a cigar and some iced soda. I can't stand human stupidity. Mine is too delicate an intellect to be worried by fools."

Mrs. Laing, of course, agreed with him, and he lay on a couch, and drank something cool, freeing himself at the same time from his necktie and the

troubles of the world. His brain was in a fiery state. He had bullied everybody all through his life, and now he found himself defied by his daughter, a chit in her teens. It was humiliating!

This "chit in her teens," though a gawky ill-grown overgrown creature, had much shyness and much obstinacy about her. It was hard to say what she might be in the days to come. An ugly duck may turn out to be a young eagle . . . but such events are rare. Charles Cotton, working away at his glass, received a visit from Amelia Laing, who knew right well that her father would not reappear, but would dose his wife with his grievances. She was accustomed to his ways; saw through his histrionic hypocrisy; felt a complete contempt for him. This is not a pleasant picture to give of a daughter's feeling towards her father; but the character that is absolutely candid is naturally hostile to the character that is utterly false. Light and darkness cannot occupy the same point in space.

Amelia Laing went down to the greenhouse, curious to see the young glazier whom her father had so roundly abused. That her father should abuse anyone was to Amelia a recommendation. Moreover, since they had lived at Scudamore Lodge, she had seen no young people at all, and her father, who was master of the letter-bag, would not allow

her to hold correspondence with her friends at a distance. Her rebellion, her protest against her mother's ill-treatment, had aroused the whole tyrant, and he was quite resolved to "break her spirit," if the thing was to be done. He humiliated her by causing her mother to keep her in a childish form of dress, when she was grown so tall that it simply looked ridiculous. A girl of five feet eight, in short frocks and pinafores, must be a trouble to herself. Luckily there was no one to see poor Amelia except the servants, who sympathised with her, hating Mr. Laing heartily. Yet, like most martinets, he was better served than many masters who prefer to treat their people as if they were human beings. So strict was his rule that not one of them dared post a letter for Amelia, fully as they sympathised with her. Perhaps she might have got that small service done if she could have offered a bribe; but, since her rebellion, she had not been allowed any pocket-money, and so was powerless.

This was one motive which took her down to the greenhouse where Charles Cotton was at work. She was a dull child, as I have said; she liked flowers, but could never remember their names, their form and colour, the way to treat them—this perhaps was a defect in education, for there had been no one to answer any questions she might ask. The

slowest of us, when we come fresh into this world from some forgotten sphere, have innumerable questions to ask. Impatient people who snub inquisitive children in such cases, are responsible for not doing their best in aid of the development of the race. However, the majority of them may be forgiven: they simply do not answer the questions of children because they do not know the answers.

Miss Laing, at her father's previous place of residence, which was in a south-western suburb, had been sent to a day school of the most exclusive gentility. Of course, it was called a Ladies' College; and there were masters for every conceivable subject that girls in the present day get a slight smattering of. I am always amused at the amount of science (slightly diluted) which you see in the prospectus of a fashionable school for girls; and I should like to see any young lady, who has learnt what they call the use of the globes, work the terrestrial and celestial globes together, and indicate the precise place in the heavens at sunrise of the planet Jupiter, as seen from Cairo, on any given day. Nothing simpler, with an Ephemeris; and this is the reason why globes (like encyclopædias) are things "no gentleman's library should be without." But what would the young lady fresh from school think if Papa were to say—

"Mary, my dear, look at the globes in the library, and tell me where Venus will be this evening at eight."

If she were a wise child she would reply, "If you call *me* Venus, Papa, I hope to be at dinner."

Miss Amelia Laing, at the fashionable day school heretofore mentioned, had made few intimate friends—in the school-girl sense of that phrase. She was unpopular, being shy and gawky and slow. Only one person took pity on her, and that was a girl a couple of years older than herself, with glossy black hair and keen black eyes, small in figure, by name Jenny Vincent. She would, in ordinary circumstances, have been a powerless ally, for she was nothing more than a pupil teacher, and expected to do work almost menial, and, indeed, doing it cheerfully enough. But her keen wit and her capacity for learning the hardest things and teaching the dullest dunces, had made her a power in the school; and stately Mrs. Whitaker, who knew nothing and could teach nothing, but who looked every inch not merely *ludi-magistra* but *archididasca*, looked forward with dismay to her term of pupilship being over, as she felt that she must be paid to remain. Jenny Vincent had been educated in a keen-witted school. Her father had kept a small shop in the City. He read the newspapers which he sold, and formed his own

opinion about them; and his customers were wont to listen to his judgments upon the various journals with much amusement. He had quite a large number of clients who bought from him for this reason.

"*Times* dull this morning," he would say. "Editor out of town, perhaps. City article stupid, as usual. Good exposure of some scamps in *Daily News*. *Telegraph*? Well, I should think Mr. Sala had been down to Richmond. It's what I call effervescent, but weak: more ginger beer than Clicquot. *Pall Mall*? Right good number, sir; editor's made up his mind that nobody but Gladstone can save the nation. *Globe*? Pinker than usual—capital paper for your housemaid to curl her hair with. Looks like Venus rising from the sea in a red sunrise."

Little Tom Vincent criticised weekly papers and magazines with equal impartiality. Nobody knew what he had been in his early days, not even his daughter; but his slang had a gentlemanly cadence, and his friendly customers felt certain that he did not begin his life at so low a level.

Tom was a widower. His daughter had a desire to learn; so he sent her as governess-pupil to Miss Whitaker, paying a premium. There was nobody there who could teach her anything; but there were books, and Jenny squeezed the juice out of a book

as fast as her father out of a newspaper. She made herself, without help, and by dint of having to teach others, a linguist and an algebraist. She took a great fancy to poor dull Amelia, which was heartily returned. And to her Amelia longed to send a letter, which she had written weeks before, adding to it at intervals, till it had become almost a diary. She knew from previous experience that it was vain to ask the servants; and she thought it just possible that the young glazier would post it for her, and not betray her. She felt certain that she could judge for herself when once she saw his face.

So she went down to the greenhouse. The gardener was talking to Cotton about the work in hand, and the young glazier was quite able to hold his own, having worked for all the gardeners of the vicinage, from Squire Englehurst's downwards. Amelia, loitering around the house, plucked a flower or two. Presently the gardener went off, having other work to do, and Miss Laing, who was nervously clutching her precious letter, looked at Cotton with an investigative glance. He must be all right, she thought; his bright blue eyes, easy carriage, rapid movement at his work, seemed to show the sort of man that could be trusted. She longed to speak to him, but did not know how to begin. What should she say? If only she was as clever as Jenny!

Charles Cotton worked away cheerily at his glass, taking slight heed of the female figure that flitted below him. He was not unobservant of girlhood, we know. One glimpse of Cecilia Englehurst had burnt her image indelibly into his brain. He dreamt of her, a pretty picture, in maiden white, with flowers in her hair and in her hand, as graceful as any Greek nymph; yet with the pretty girlish dignity of the young English lady. He laughed at himself for being haunted by that fair form. If he had cared to look much at Amelia Laing, he would merely have noted a commonplace young person, too tall for her frocks, with a freckled countenance and an awkward manner.

Professors of the cosmetic art assure the ladies that freckles can be removed by their nostrums, just as Mr. Turveydrop could, in his own judgment, cure awkwardness. But neither lotion nor lesson would do. Both are signs of an inward malady. To cure freckles, improve the digestion; to cure awkwardness, develop the intellect.

The glazier was at his glass; the young lady professedly looking at flowers. Presently an accident produced a crisis. The step of a very rickety ladder gave way, and down came Charles Cotton on his back upon the brick floor, smashing a good deal of

glass. At once Amelia rushed to the rescue; but Cotton was only a trifle bruised, and stood erect without help.

"I was afraid you were killed," she said.

"I am not hurt, thank you, Miss," he replied. "The ladder is quite rotten. I must find another."

"You might have had a dreadful accident," said Amelia, sympathisingly. "Are you sure you are not hurt? Shall I get you anything?"

"Thank you, no," replied Cotton, though he'd have given a trifle for a drop of spirit. "It was only a shake."

It was, however, rather a severe shake, for Cotton found it requisite to rest on some of the woodwork; and Amelia, with woman's apprehension that something was wrong, ran across to the kitchen, and told the cook all about it. Never was good cook without cognac. Amelia came rapidly back with a drop of strong brandy and water, which he drank, and was refreshed.

"I don't know how to thank you for your kindness, Miss Laing," he said. "I wish I could do something to prove my gratitude."

"You can do me a kindness," she replied. "Will you post a letter for me?"

And she handed him from her pocket a rather crumpled epistle, addressed—

“*Miss Vincent,*

Merton Cottage,

Wimbledon.”

“With pleasure,” he answered, taking it from her.

At that moment who should enter the greenhouse but Mr. Laing, who had recovered from his headache and heartache by aid of brandy and soda—a respectable dose—and who was infuriated to see *his* daughter talking to a working man! He did not see the letter pass from one to another, or the fierce little man might have tried to put them both to death on the spot.

“Go in, you young hussy!” he cried, almost inarticulate with rage. “If you are left alone an instant, this is the way you go on.”

She turned and faced him, looking down upon him with indignation.

“This man has had an accident,” she said, “from a rotten ladder of yours breaking. I got him something from the kitchen, to save him from fainting. Is there any harm in that?”

“Anybody can coin an excuse,” he said, angrily but cowardly. “I believe as much as I please. I find a young lady and a working man with a glass

of spirits and water in a corner of my greenhouse. I draw my own conclusions. If that young lady were not my own daughter, I should still draw my own conclusions. Be good enough to go to your room, Amelia; as to you, sir, perhaps in future your master will send some other workman."

Amelia had obeyed orders. Cotton was left alone, a little puzzled by the situation. Being a gentleman by nature, he could not understand any man's treating his daughter as this man Laing had just done. He instinctively felt that the honour of one's family ought to be regarded. He could not comprehend a person calling himself a gentleman, yet behaving to his own child in so abominable a way. As to what Mr. Laing had said to him, Charles Cotton cared not; why should he? The groundless displeasure of other people need trouble no man who is master of an honest trade, and can win a fair living whithersoever he goes. Cotton laughed at Laing, but he pitied poor Amelia, who evidently had to fight hard for a barely endurable existence.

He took out her letter, and examined it. That letter was just like herself. The address was written in gawky letters of uneven lengths. The seal had a crest and motto on it; but so badly had the wax been used that it was quite undecipherable. The stamp was on the wrong corner of the envelope.

Altogether it was a perfect reflex of its writer. He posted it at a wayside pillar-box, little guessing what the result would be.

Our young artist in glass got no lift homewards. He trudged stoutly through the soft sunset air, pondering his adventure, wondering what he had better say to Wrangel. His immediate instinct was to tell the whole story; but he decided to defer it till the morning, when he and his master were alone together, having no wish for a running commentary from the three Miss Wrangels. So he took what remained of his shelf of glass up to his uncle Richard's; and he found that worthy old Plymouth Brother had just stepped out. Charles Cotton thereupon stepped out again himself, for he knew a coign of 'vantage in the woods near Englehurst Park, where sometimes of an evening he could see the fair Cecilia wandering alone, and singing like a bird. The boy nursed his dream; drank the passionate poison; thought of Cecilia Englehurst only. And this night he was rewarded. Her white muslin swept the sward beneath him, just the other side of the park palings; and she sang a trifle of the day—

O swan, float still! O heron, fly far!
O silver the river, thou evening star;
O river, silently downward pass,
Let me hear her footstep over the grass!

The swan was quiet, and far away
The heron soared, a wonder of grey;
And the starlit river was hushed and still—
But the lady came not, nor ever will.

“A bad omen,” thought Charlie to himself. “Yet the lady *is* here, after all, and I daresay she will come again, and I shall hear her sing. If God gives me no greater happiness than that, I shall have been happy. Her beautiful voice comes through me as I fancy sunshine goes through a flower. Sunshine kills the roses, though, sometimes.”

Cecilia ran in, to preside over coffee in the drawing-room. Cotton walked slowly and thoughtfully home. When he reached his uncle Richard's cottage he found that worthy old gentleman leaning over the garden gate. The uncle said:

“I don't know what you've been doing, but the Squire says you're to go up to the Hall directly minute you come home.”

“Supper first, uncle,” said Cotton. “Cold roast beef and lettuces, and a pint of beer. Then I'm ready for the Squire.”

As Charlie's earnings made his uncle's mode of life more comfortable, he generally had his own way. He ate a grand supper, and then started for the Hall, wondering whether he should see—Cecilia.

CHAPTER VI.

CRAKE'S DEN.

"Will you walk into my parlour? said the spider to the fly."

NOT all the experience of many generations—how many I leave to the palæontologists—will prevent the human fly from walking into the parlour of the human spider. The cunning insect spreads his net, and its meshes quickly entangle the brilliant dragon-fly of the Guards, the sparkling butterfly of Mayfair, the dangerous wasp of literature, the busy bluebottle of commerce. "Forewarned, forearmed," says the proverb; but few proverbs ever were so mistaken. If anybody ever was effectually forearmed I wish he would publish his autobiography; it might be of some use to the ingenuous and ingenious youth of the day.

Mr. Crake was a human spider, and took flies of all kinds. He had many vocations. He promoted companies. He got shady defaulters through the Bankruptcy Court in an easy slippery way. He discounted bills at sixty per cent, for youngsters at

college and men in the army. He sold diamonds, and had indeed another address, "The Diamond Fields, South Africa." He got up divorce cases with secrecy and despatch. He gave a low price for stolen bank-notes, and got them into circulation quietly. And lately he had been doing a fine trade in diamonds, having found in Slippery Jack a remarkably clever tool.

Crake's house, with its double entrance, has already been mentioned. It had many reception rooms, of various grades. A gentleman has just alighted from a hansom at Crake's respectable entrance, and rung the bell, and been admitted by the highly respectable man-servant, who was junior partner. He is shown into a room on the first floor; there is a cold luncheon on the table, with unopened champagne bottles, and vases of flowers, and much silver plate on the sideboard. The fidgety little gentleman who is kept waiting in this room some ten minutes, is angry at these signs of luxury for which he knows he has helped to pay.

Presently in comes Crake, in a devil of a temper. No wonder. He has just read in his *Times* a telegram to this effect:—

"An attempt has been made to rob Englehurst Hall. The burglars were captured, and will at once be brought before the magistrates."

"I didn't think Slippery Jack was such a fool," said Crake to himself. "Idiot!" he exclaimed, and threw the paper down in disgust.

Then he went upstairs to his visitor, Mr. Laing, of Scudamore Lodge.

"You look unhappy, Crake," said that gentleman. "Never mind, I have brought you a bargain. I want two thousand for a twelvemonth, and I'll give you a first mortgage on my place in Kent. What can you do it for?"

"I'd rather not touch it, Mr. Laing," said Crake, "I've lost so much lately."

"Not by me," interrupted Laing, sharply. "Have I not always paid to the day?"

"Well, that's true," replied Crake; "and if it's all right I can do it for two five. I suppose you've got the title-deeds?"

"Of course I have," said Laing. He took some antique-looking documents from his breast pocket. "You know the place; you've been down there with me; there are eight hundred acres of splendid land. I defy you to find sounder security; and I shouldn't give the interest, only that I want the money in a hurry, for my daughter is going to marry Lord Bellasys."

"The devil!" thought Crake. Crake knew Lord Bellasys, but had never lent him money, for the

simple reason that Lord Bellasys, though the fastest man in London, had an income too vast for his wildest extravagation. Crake thought, however, that this fat fly might some day or other be tempted into his harbour, with Mr. Laing for decoy; so he said,

"Well, Mr. Laing, I will entertain your proposal. You shall have two thousand as soon as the mortgage deed is ready."

"My solicitors shall draw it at once, and send it you. Meanwhile let me have five hundred on an I O U, because Lord Bellasys is in a devil of a hurry, and I must throw away a lot of money just now."

Mr. Laing got a cheque for five hundred on the Bank of England, where most bill discounters keep their accounts for the sake of respectability. Then the fly had a glass of wine with the spider, and went off to cash his cheque.

Crake, his customer gone, sat down to ruminate on the state of affairs. He put a little brandy into the glass of champagne which he was drinking, just to quicken the circulation of his ideas. Many transactions had there been between himself and Laing: Laing, though the sources of his income were dubious, borrowed money at sixty per cent., and always paid to the day. It is an expensive way of living, hardly practicable unless you can get a hundred per cent. from somebody else.

"Well," soliloquised Crake, over his alcoholic refresher, "that man is an odd fish. I don't think I remember him in such a deuce of a hurry before. He's paid me a lot of money," he thought, with a grin of great satisfaction.

He struck a hand-bell, and the "junior partner" entered.

"Norris," he said, "I want to look at Laing's account with us. And bring me Debrett's Peerage at the same time."

The footman did his bidding rapidly. On his return he said—

"I doubt if Laing is very safe. They say he's been let in by Erie. I wouldn't give him anything heavy without sound security."

"All right," said Crake, and began to study the little account-book, which was marked with a number that in the ledger corresponded to Mr. Laing's name.

"A good customer," quoth old Crake to himself; "a fine customer. He's had eleven thousand of mine in six years, and he's paid it all back, and about six thousand for the use of it. I wonder what his little game is. I can't afford to borrow money at that rate."

Crake thought nothing of his junior partner's warning. A man who could afford to borrow money at such a rate was not the man to speculate in Erie.

No; Crake felt certain that he was master of one of the modern alchymies; he either went on the Stock Exchange, or kept a hell, or had speculative liaisons with the Foreign Offices of Europe. So he felt quite comfortable about that cheque for five hundred which had just passed from his hands.

Then he turned to Debrett. Edgar, 17th Baron Bellasys: crest, the lovely foundress of the family; punning motto, *Bella Sis*. The Bellasys had been as fortunate as the House of Hapsburg in marrying heiresses, and young Lord Bellasys was generally supposed to be the richest noble in England, except the unhappy few who are so egregiously opulent they have to be managed by committees and allowed pocket-money, and married by treaty. It is a sad thing for a man to have an unmanageable income; almost as bad as an unmanageable wife.

Crake pondered the question. Was Bellasys a marrying man? He had not thought so from his previous career. Edgar Lord Bellasys was 35; he had yachted round the world, won a Derby, broken the bank at Homburg, and been co-respondent in a divorce case. He was the very last man you would expect to settle down and marry a quiet country girl. And Crake could not remember what manner of young woman Miss Laing was. He could imagine Bellasys set on fire by some wild creature full of

amorous passion, just as potassium breaks into flame at touch of oxygen. He could not imagine the cool plausible imperturbable Laing having such a daughter. Your crafty scoundrel needs to study human nature as keenly as a great dramatist; and Spider Crake was a careful student and skilful handler of men.

Dismissing Mr. Laing with the final conclusion that he was not likely to lose by him, Crake returned to the consideration of that newspaper paragraph which had so startled him. He did not like it at all. He hated failures. Besides, these fellows being caught, what might not a dexterous counsel discover as to the person who employed them? Crake had no fear of Slippery Jack, but the Parson was such a fool. He did not at all like the situation. He read the paragraph a dozen times, and liked it less each time. He could not know what was going on; he dared not interfere; he saw that he must wait—and he abhorred waiting. It was therefore with great satisfaction that he saw the junior partner enter with a message to the effect that Slippery Jack and the Parson wanted to see him. There was a merry twinkle in the junior partner's eye, which assured Crake that their news was good.

"Why, I thought you were lagged," said Crake, on their entry. The Parson was beginning a pom-

pous yarn; but the Slippery One put his hand on his mouth and said—

“We were, Mr. Crake. We shall be again, unless you stow us away, for there’s a regular hue and cry. You’ll find some stones in that bag, Mr. Crake, and I know you’ll do what’s right by us; but the first thing is to make us safe somewhere.”

Crake put the bag into an iron box, and then touched a spring which opened a secret door in the wall. The Slippery One and the Parson followed him silently down a long dark damp flight of steps, which ultimately landed them in the highest story of a water-side public-house, known as the Water Rat, though I forget whether that was its sign. Leaving the new-comers in this quaint old room, Crake went in search of the landlord. He had to do this by descending through a trapdoor, for the attic was merely a loft, and the communication with it was carefully concealed. Indeed the trapdoor opened into the room occupied by a maidservant, who happened to be washing herself (a thing which even London servant-girls do at intervals) when Crake’s legs came through the trapdoor. She was not at all astonished; she helped him down with her soapy hands.

Slippery Jack and the Parson were taken in at the Water Rat, which in fact was one of several

outposts of Spider Crake's cobweb. The servant-girl who dwelt below brought them their food, and would virtuously have resisted any attempt on the part of the police to search her rooms as indecent beyond measure.

Having got rid of his two inferior scoundrels, Crake opened the bag, and poured the jewels out on the table. There were diamonds of the purest water, oriental sapphires, rubies redder than the planet Mars, emeralds of the darkest green. He knew the stones pretty well; it was Crake's business to know where there were diamonds worth stealing. Having looked them through, he missed a famous blue diamond, with a core of golden light in its very centre, which Sir Humphrey Davy had much desired to analyse, in order to discover the cause of a phenomenon so curious. A golden light in the heart of an azure diamond is really strange. We all know that diamond is merely pure carbon, and can be turned into charcoal easily enough. But the formation of this unique gem is still a mystery of creation. Is it the product of some sudden crystallisation under infinite pressure caused by geological change? The inquisitive intellect of our great chymist, Sir Humphrey Davy, was much employed on this question. He exposed carbon to intense heat, both *in vacuo* and in condensed nitrogen; and the lustre of the carbon

was much increased, and the carbon was hard enough to cut glass. It is curious that no chymical experimenter has followed in this inviting track; but the truth is that our contemporary men love the lecture-room better than the laboratory, and that even Faraday was a very bad second to the indefatigable Sir Humphrey.

"I didn't suppose," soliloquised Crake, "that those fellows would bring me all the stones. Some stick to their fingers, naturally. But I can't fancy they've dared to take that famous diamond, which nobody who knows anything about stones would venture to buy. Where can it be? I could get a nice sum of money for it from the Shah or the Khedive; and a jolly trip it would be to go and negotiate with them."

Crake was puzzled and disappointed, and could only suppose that Squire Englehurst had put away the famous diamond in some less known place than that where the bulk of his daughter's jewels was kept. However, his myrmidons had brought him a very valuable haul; and a descriptive telegram in cypher to a confidential friend in Amsterdam was promptly despatched, and answered with equal promptitude. The result was that Crake, having summoned his junior partner and given him certain instructions, prepared to make an immediate start

for the Continent. When he had a big job on hand, he liked to do it personally.

But his day's work at home was not over. Presently he had to give audience to the Honourable Clarence Vere, a younger son of the well-known Lord Vaurien, but without the resplendent scampishness of his father. A well-preserved and well-dressed man of forty, Vere got himself put in the *Peerage* a dozen years younger. He had never had any income, for his worthy old father spent all he received and a great deal more; so Vere had lived by his wits, with ulterior design to marry an heiress. The particular heiress was not yet found; but Vere was in no hurry; he wished to sow his wild oats first. Moreover, he had hit upon a rather distinguished mode of making a gentlemanly living, and keeping on the surface of society, swindling Lord Verisopht and going very far with Lady Veriphast. When nobody would lend him any more money, and it was a case of Basinghall Street or Boulogne, a sudden thought struck him, and he went straight to Crake.

"I'm off," he said, "unless I can make an arrangement. Don't know what I owe all round; dare say you know what I owe you?"

And he leaned back in a chair in Crake's sanctum, smoking a cigarette.

"Rather," replied Crake, laconically.

"Well, it comes to this. I'm in society, and go with the swim. There's lots of men, and women too for that matter, who'll give any price for ready money at a pinch. You stop these fellows that are bothering me, and I'll send you all the best people, and you'll give me a commission."

The idea struck Crake as a good one. He could always pull this scapegrace up by insisting on his money. He employed him in this highly honourable way, and the decoy brought him many clients . . . men reckoning on their fathers' death, and women pledging their bridal diamonds. Fashion flies too fast for all but the men with princely incomes, and even they sometimes find it hard to keep steady in the rapids, as this incident goes to show.

"Ha! Crake," said the Honourable Clarence Vere, in his airiest way, "hope you're not too busy to give me something effervescent and iced?"

"I'm just off to the Continent," said Crake, drily, "and I fear nothing you have to tell me will pay for the hock and seltzer which is your favourite liquid. Still you shall have it."

"Wrong for once," said Clarence Vere, as he slaked his thirst. "Come, I'll bet you a pony that what I am going to tell you will prevent your journey."

"Done," said Crake.

"Good!" said Vere, quietly registering the bet. "Listen. Bellasys wants money, and I am going to bring him here to-night."

"The devil!" said Crake. "Will you have a cheque, or bank-notes?"

"Cheque, thanks," said Vere, getting up sharply. "We'll be here at midnight; I must be off, as we dine together, and go to half a dozen places after."

Crake, when his sprightly subaltern had left him, sat for some time in a brown study. Why should Bellasys want money? Nothing outrageous had been attributed to him of late. He had simply carried out the saying, *Noblesse oblige*, as too many of our modern patricians choose to read it. He had been lucky on the turf, and in other forms of speculation to which our suckling peers are much addicted. But Crake, whose business it was to know more of people's private affairs than all the Pollakies in Europe, could not guess at a reason for this young noble's being hard up.

He would not go to Amsterdam, that was certain. Was it safe to keep the diamonds in England? He thought not. The police would be on the track pretty soon. There was but one thing to be done. He would send them out by the junior partner, and instruct him as to the amount he ought

to get for them. So he summoned Norris, and explained the whole affair.

"Get away early in the morning," he said. "I don't know about the steamers, but you had better be out of this before sunrise, in case of accidents; and you can find out everything at London Bridge. There is a line to Focking; mind you don't take a farthing less than the sum in my memorandum: get twice as much if you can. The stones are well worth it. And now have supper laid for three in the blue room at twelve: everything first-rate, for Bellasys is a big fish."

This arranged, Crake strolled into Piccadilly, dined at the Criterion, and passed an hour or two at the Criterion Theatre. He did not care about drama, legitimate or illegitimate; but he found that light and noise, song and dance, relieved a brain that all day had been set upon intrigue and arithmetic. So he almost always dined at a good place, drank sound stimulant wine, and went into a box or stall thereafter. He could not, an hour later, have told you the *menu* of his dinner or the name of his play; but he got the distraction he needed.

Meanwhile Lord Bellasys and Clarence Vere had dined at the Raleigh. Thence, "just for a breath of air," as Bellasys put it (and certes, 'twas a sultry night), they drove tandem, a noble pair of roans, down to Caprice Cottage, Fulham.

"I suppose the fellow will do it," said Bellasys, flicking his leader, so that he sprang off and set all his warning bells into a tremendous tintinnabulation as they drove back to town.

"Of course he will," said Vere, lighting a cigar under difficulties. "Fool if he didn't."

"And I suppose you think me a fool too," said Bellasys.

"Of course I do, my dear fellow, but you need not press one to say it in so definite a way."

"I think I'm right," said Bellasys, and gave his leader another sharp touch, and said no more till he reached the door of Mr. Crake's chambers, just as Big Ben was saying *Midnight*. The door opened as they got down, and the junior partner, in his choicest footman's apparel, showed them into a room where supper was laid for three. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's exclamation—

"O when the long hours of the public are past,
To meet with champagne and a chicken at last,"

was quite outdone by Crake's suppers.

Lord Bellasys and his friend were ushered into the room, where Crake received them with infinite servility.

Crake, a judge of character by profession, could hardly approximate to a judgment of Lord Bellasys. A man of five feet ten, broad shouldered, the

Cornish wrestler's build all through, with brown hair very short, a shaven face, and the clearest blue eye Crake had ever encountered. That eye would have told Bellasys, if a Lavater had looked at him; but Crake, accustomed to the world's seamiest side, was by no means a Lavater.

And the easy style of Lord Bellasys puzzled him even more.

"Ah, you have supper ready, Mr. Crake; I will just take a biscuit and a glass of noyau, for my horses pulled rather. Then, as to business. Vere tells me you have money, and like to lend it at a profit. I have money, and like to spend it. Now, here is the question,—will you obtain for me, in the course of to-morrow, bank-notes for fifty thousand pounds, if I give you a post-dated cheque on Drummond for sixty thousand. My cheque shall be payable two months hence. I am going to be married, and I want money."

Crake hesitated a moment. It was a grand temptation, and all his inquiries about Lord Bellasys had served to show that he met his engagements. Moreover, he had been told that Lord Bellasys was about to marry Laing's daughter. What puzzled the usurer was the eccentricity of the proposal. But his hesitation lasted only a moment.

"Yes, my lord," he said. "Where shall I send the notes?"

"To Long's. I breakfast at twelve. If you or your messenger can be there between twelve and two with the notes, the cheque shall be ready. Don't disappoint me."

"Rely on me, my lord," said Crake. Then he went back to where the unused supper was spread, ate some lobster salad, and drank some champagne. Then he rang for the junior partner, told him he had made a grand *coup*, and advised him to be off to Amsterdam as soon as possible. Very jolly was Crake that night; a fine burglarious haul of diamonds, and ten thousand pounds in two months without any risk, were wonderful prizes for a single day. He felt he had done his duty, and Providence had properly rewarded him.

As to Lord Bellasys, who was never like other men, he dropt Clarence Vere at his Jermyn Street rooms, and worked off his excitement by driving his roans a dozen miles out of town, and then back to Long's. London was crimsoned by sunrise over all its lofty towers and labyrinthine streets when Bellasys sent his sleepy groom off with his horses, and went quietly to bed, telling the night porter to wake him at twelve—and not before, if Doomsday happened to occur.

CHAPTER VII.

WHO IS THE CRIMINAL?

"When life's at the worst, and your brain's in a panic,
Don't take refuge in strychnine or hydrocyanic.
To leave this our world by an improper portal,
Is beneath the high rank of a spirit immortal."

SYNESIUS—*De Suicida.*

WHY was Charles Cotton wanted at the Hall? The answer is simple. That shrieking housemaid who announced the loss of the jewels, when she was reduced to comparative calmness and cross-examined, which took a considerable time, stated that she had seen Cotton come out of the Squire's room just before she discovered the safe was open. She supposed he had to go and look whether the windows were all right. She was quite sure he was there.

The Squire and the Marquis were puzzled by this curious bit of evidence. Cotton had professedly gone away to attend to his day's work at that time. He could by no means have any business in Mr. Englehurst's bedroom. They discussed the matter carefully. The housemaid, a simple girl from Engle-

hurst village, of nineteen or twenty, could have no apparent motive for stating an untruth.

"I can't understand this," said the Squire. "Cotton seems to me a very honest candid young fellow. I won't believe him a thief, in league with those villains from London. Yet why was he in my room?"

"It is a problem," said Castelcicala, "and we shall have to wait for its solution. I do not believe Cotton was in your room. That girl may have fancied she saw him."

"Fancied? What do you mean?"

"She is at an excitable age. She was frightened when she saw your safe opened and rifled. An attack of the *hysterica passio* may have made her believe she saw Cotton when he was not there. You will find he will deny he was there."

"Of course," said the Squire; "guilty or innocent, he'll do that. But who cut the cords of those burglars, and helped them to clear the safe? And who could have unlocked the safe, or picked its lock, so cleverly?"

"Not Cotton, my friend," said the Marquis. "He is not the man for that kind of work. It is one of the most difficult enigmas I have known, and I have passed my life in solving enigmas. I shall find a clue, it is certain. I might almost say I *have* found

a clue, by the Archimedean principle of exhaustion."

"What do you think?" said the Squire, eagerly.

"I think nothing yet, my friend. I probe the darkness. You may never find your jewels again, but I will find the thief—and he will not be Charles Cotton."

Cis Englehurst was of course aware that her diamonds had fled; but the Squire told her nothing of his suspicions, and when he found that Cotton would be away till evening, ordered out his four in hand, put his daughter on the box, and drove her twenty miles to Garston Mere, where they held an impromptu pic-nic together, on a green promontory which thrust itself defiantly into the lovely lake—a lake where the Fay Morgana might well be seen for an instant, and vanish. The Marquis declined to come; and father and daughter, who were wondrous good comrades, enjoyed their time. Cis's young heart was as yet unstirred by the love-trouble; she loved nobody save her father, and just for the brief time when it is possible for father and daughter thus to love each other, he seeing in the young creature what he saw years ago in her mother, she regarding him as the noblest of men and the most loveable, how great is the delight! Two young lovers could not have got more pleasure out of a pic-nic

by the solitary mere, watching the heron fishing the pools for lake-trout, and the falcon hovering high above, waiting for the heron to rise with its prey. The heron found its fish and rose: the hawk fell from the firmament like a flash of lightning, and clutched the luckless bird.

"I wonder if the old Augurs could get anything out of that about my diamonds," thought the Squire.

The Marquis de Castelcicala had the little housemaid sent to him, and questioned her as to her seeing Cotton in the Squire's room. She adhered to her story. She was quite certain it was he, and no other. Then he made inquiries as to her family. Her name was Julia, but the housekeeper insisted on her being called Ann, which she seemed to think a great grievance; and her family name was Pinnell; and her only relation was her maiden aunt, as lived at a cottage just opposite Mr. Jenkins's, and the Squire made her comfortable because she had been in his service years ago, and in his father's time as well.

Castelcicala went off to see the maiden aunt, who turned out to be a great aunt. She was in a cosy little cottage with trees in front, and was reading the Bible quietly. In old age people go back to the Bible, and are apt to wonder they ever left it

for the sermons of popular preachers. This quiet old lady, who had passed her eightieth year, reading for the thousandth time the ancient idyl of Ruth amid the alien corn, and mingling it with vague thoughts of the poetic might-have-been of her own gay girlhood, was a rare picture. The Marquis, a connoisseur of humanity, enjoyed it.

After talk of other matters, he led her to talk of Miss Julia Pinnell. It was clear the old lady did not think much of the generation two stages forward. Certes, that pallid aristocratic face had little in common with the florid countenance of the housemaid. The Marquis, carefully humouring the old lady, found out that she considered her great-niece not very much better than she should be.

"She's a little hussy," she said. "The girls are all alike now. Father would have whipped me well if I'd done what these young things do. Now here's a bit of paper she dropt," she continued, turning to the beginning of her Bible. "I can't make it out; but perhaps you can, sir?"

Castelcicala started when he saw it.

"Yes," he said, "I think I can make it out. May I take it with me?"

"O yes," said the old lady; whereupon the Marquis, amazed at having strengthened his clue in a quarter hardly expected, gave her a couple of sove-

reigns, and walked slowly towards Englehurst Hall, much pondering. The louts at the Five Horseshoes beheld him pass, and made uncomplimentary remarks in a cowardly whisper. I wonder whether Earl Russell, whose quaint little pamphlet on education has just appeared as I write, could have explained to those bucolic beer-consumers who Wellington was—a fact which he seems to think every Englishman must know.

Castelcicala, a subtle Italian, with a somewhat Macchiavellian brain, dimly laboured at his problem as he loitered back towards Englehurst Hall. The solution had suddenly flashed on him, and he now had unexpected corroborative evidence; but he saw clearly that he must wait awhile before acting. There was nothing quite definite enough to satisfy the English magistrate, whose duty it is to give a suspected person the benefit of every doubt. So he kept his opinion to himself, waiting for what might come next. He was standing at the grand entrance of Englehurst Hall, ready to help pretty Cis from her seat, and as she sprang from the wheel, agile as a squirrel, he said,

“You have enjoyed your day, I am sure.”

“Indeed I have,” she replied. “It is always pleasant with papa.”

At dinner and after nothing was said of the dis-

agreeable affair. They went soon to the drawing-room. Cis Englehurst, after her long drive in open air and the general excitement of the day, was very tired. She leaned back in her chair, a pretty infantile picture, scarce able to keep her soft eyelids from drooping over her opal eyes.

"You won't sing to-night," said the Marquis, "I know. Come, shall I sing you a quaint sleepy madrigal that I found in a worm-eaten old music-book in your father's library to-day?"

"O do, please," she said, wakening up.

Castelcicala, in a tenor almost equal to Mario's, sang, touching the piano deftly—

My beauty speaks. Her speech is song;
Her silver-sounding words
Out-do the quiring throng
Of musical birds.

O speak again, my sweet, O speak again!
Silence is pain.

My beauty sings. Heaven's golden sea,
And the inaudible spheres
Have a new voice for me;
My spirit hears.

O sing again, fair minstrel, sing again
That strange sweet strain!

My beauty sleeps. I guess her eyes
Beneath those lids pearl-white;
Her sweet breasts sink and rise
To dream's delight.

O dream of me, sweet sleeper, dream again:
And not in vain!

The Marquis's song made pretty Cis sleepier than before, as indeed was his design. So she tripped away to her quiet, cool chamber, fearless of burglars this night at least, since a second attack seemed an impossibility. Ah, but she was a fearless child always, as our story will show. She sent her maid away, and said short prayers, and was soon in a soft calm sleep, dreaming of nobody.

She had not been gone five minutes when Cotton's arrival was notified to the Squire.

"Send him here," said Mr. Englehurst.

"Note the young fellow as he comes in," said the Marquis. "It is either hangdog or bluster with guilty people; the innocent are unsuspicious and unconcerned."

Certes, Charles Cotton looked unconcerned enough when shown into the Squire's presence; and to both gentlemen he seemed the unlikeliest of men to be in league with thieves.

"Cotton," said the Squire, "before you left the Hall this morning, did you go into my bedroom?"

Cotton, who was quite unable to understand the reason of this sudden question, said—

"No, sir. I went straight away and bathed, and went to my work."

"Well," said the Squire, "your answer is frank enough, and no doubt the facts can be proved; but those thieves you helped so well to catch have escaped, somebody cutting their cords, and they took thousands of pounds' worth of diamonds from a safe in my bedroom."

"Who could have cut the cords?" said Cotton. "I am sure we tied the scoundrels fast enough."

He did not see the drift of the conversation, and had not the remotest idea that he could be suspected.

"Well, Cotton," said the Squire, "it comes to this. The housemaid who discovered the robbery declared that you were in the room at the time, or just before."

"The little liar!" exclaimed Charles Cotton. "I should like to talk to her. May she come up?"

"It is only fair," said the Squire.

"Is it wise?" asked the Marquis.

"Fair before wise," said the Squire, ringing the bell and ordering her up. She came, a slightly scrofulous doll, of a type too common where the sins of parents have been visited on their children.

Charles Cotton looked at her with an indignant gaze. Knowing himself incapable of theft, he felt a

courageous contempt for anyone who could think theft possible of him. There are men, and women too, who steal with delighted avidity, thinking they have done something clever; whereas Charles Cotton liked to work for his living, and to feel he was earning it.

This Julia Pinnell came in with a false look. She curtsied humbly to the Squire, who said,

"You are sure you saw Mr. Cotton in my room this morning?"

"Quite sure, sir," she said.

"What was he doing?"

"I didn't notice, sir. He had a bunch of keys in his hand."

"The Lie Circumstantial," thought the Marquis.

"You are perfectly sure it was Cotton?"

"O yes, sir, I couldn't mistake him. He said, 'How are you, Julia?'"

"You can go," said the Squire.

"Mr. Englehurst," said Cotton, when she was gone, "I can't guess why that wench lies, but she *does* lie. I have never spoken to her in my life, and hadn't an idea her name was Julia. If a man had been lying about me in that way, I'd have twisted his neck before he left the room."

Charles Cotton was moved to tears of wrath. He snatched at the handkerchief in his pocket to hide the mist which seldom comes upon a strong man's eyes, though it hovers over those of women. As he did so, something fell on the floor, and the Marquis said, "What have you dropped, Mr. Cotton?"

He took a candle to find out, and to his utter amazement the sole thing he could find, buried deep in the soft Wilton carpet, was a small diamond ring that Mrs. Englehurst used to wear.

Cotton laid it on the oak table.

The Squire looked puzzled.

Castelcicala laughed.

"There's something saved," said the Marquis, "though 'tis only a little ring."

"Yes," said the Squire, sorrowfully, "but it is of value to me, and will be to Cis, for it was my first gift to my dear wife. But it looks very strange."

The Squire's was a stolid and by no means fast-travelling intellect. Give him time, and he'd come to a just judgment on any question. Unfortunately, the one thing that never is given us in this world is time.

"It is strange," said the Marquis. "Now, Englehurst, will you let me carry out this matter in my

own way? You don't believe, I am sure, that Cotton stole that ring."

"I don't," said the Squire, emphatically, "though I'm hanged if I see my way out of it."

"I think I do," said the Marquis. "Trust both the ring and Cotton to me. Now, Cotton, obey orders. Don't go near your home to-night, but walk to the Scrutton Station straight from here, and take the first train to London. Do you want money?"

"I have plenty for the present," said Cotton.

"Very well. When you get to London go to this address," he continued, giving him a card that had *Soho* as its final word. "The people are old servants of mine. Wait there till you hear from me or see me. Don't be long away from the place. They will make you comfortable."

Charles Cotton showed that he might have been a good soldier, by at once obeying orders. Off he went; caught his train; got to the quaint foreign courtyard in Soho, in time for a late supper of all manner of things never tasted by him before. The Marquis's commands made the owners of the place treat him *en Prince*.

"I don't quite understand your game, Castalcicala," said the Squire; "but I hope it is all right."

"I fancy so," he said. "Matters more impor-

tant than even your priceless diamonds are involved. Take your rest easily. We'll get at the truth."

"And get back some more of the diamonds, I hope. I wonder how Cotton happened to have that ring in his pocket. Do you think somebody put it there?"

"If so, who was somebody? and why should he put it there?" said the Marquis. "It's a complex puzzle, Englehurst, but we'll solve it."

The Squire went to bed. The Marquis did not. He rang for Redi, stripped to his shirt and trousers, and woke himself up with a fencing bout. Then he sat down to a glass of something iced, and read Byron's *Beppo*—a poem that it is easy to read many times over. This done, he opened a small antique casket, delicately carved by some fine Italian hand, with four ivory chess rooks at each corner, and golden grasshoppers all over it. It contained a row of small books, all differently bound, and on each a title in a different cypher. Choosing one of these, the Marquis opened its gold clasp with a tiny key of the same metal, looked carefully through a few pages written in cypher, and then added half a page of memoranda, also in cypher, written with a crow-quill in the finest conceivable characters.

"Now," he said to himself, "I shall checkmate this intriguer, who thinks himself born to control the policy of Europe."

Charles Cotton awoke in the morning in the Soho Court with a half-stifled feeling. He had a clean and airy room on the third floor, for the house was old, and had once been a stately residence, as the carved cornices and mantelpieces attested. His bed occupied just a corner of the large room; over the rest of it were scattered chairs and tables of many patterns, and on the tables were clocks under glass shades, dagger paper knives, quaint candelabra, carved caskets, old miniatures on ivory, books in many languages antiquely bound. The walls, too, were hung with pictures and prints of value for their rarity. Cotton could not make it out; but he dressed as fast as he could, anxious to get a breath of fresh air, if any such thing existed in London. It was only five o'clock, his watch told him, and he doubted being able to get out, but resolved to try. What with yesterday's excitement and the close atmosphere which seemed so horrible a contrast to the odour of honeysuckles and roses which greeted him through his uncle's cottage window, when the garrulous starlings woke him at sunrise, his brain was in a whirl. He had obeyed the Marquis's orders, and come away to London secretly; but now he wondered

whether he ought to have allowed his own will to be thus subjected to the will of another. It was difficult for a youngster like himself to resist the commanding style of the accomplished diplomatist; but he began to think of what all the village would say—his uncle, old Wrangel, Wrangel's gossiping daughters; last, and by no means least, Miss Englehurst.

"They will all think me a thief," he bitterly reflected. "And that *she* should think me one, if she condescends to think of me at all, is intolerable. What strange plot is there against me? How can I have any enemies? How came that ring in my pocket?"

Cotton felt desperate. His perplexity was not lightened by the crass London air. He opened his door and descended the broad stone stairs quietly, not desiring to waken any other lodgers. But he was not the first man awake in that house by any means. As he crossed the hall he noticed a small glass enclosure, with shelves to the roof, covered with all sorts of glass and china and plate; and therein stood bald-headed rosy-cheeked Monsieur Dulau, polishing away at glass, and singing in a low voice—

"Commissaire! commissaire!
Colin bat sa ménagère."

An act of impiety of which Achille Dulau would certainly not have been guilty, since he worshipped Madame, and was also slightly afraid of her. He turned on hearing Cotton's step, and said:—

“Ah, monsieur, you are *matinal*. Nor do you look well. It is *migraine*. No wonder. London is close you know, thick, *épaisse*.”

Dulau had been the Marquis's travelling valet, and his language was in a conglomerate state.

“I want a breath of fresh air,” said Cotton.

“Fresh air! It shall you have. But first, some medicine I will prepare, *tisane*, excellent for *mal de tête*. *Vois!*”

Charles Cotton with some curiosity beheld the Frenchman put a wine-glass into a tumbler, and into the wine-glass pour a greenish fluid. Then he took pure water, and poured it into the wine-glass till all the spirit had flowed over into the tumbler, leaving only clear lymph behind. Then, taking out the wine-glass, he handed the tumbler to Cotton, saying,

“Drink!”

Cotton drank, and did not like it. But he soon liked the effect. His veins grew warm; the dull feeling departed from his brain. He had tasted absinthe, the essence of the embittering wormwood

(that perilous flower beloved by Artemis), the deadly drink of which Alfred de Musset perished.

"One glass medicine," laconically said Achille Dulau, "two, poison. Come, I am away to Billingsgate to buy fish. I have a great prince here, a friend, like you, of his Excellency, who must have fish for breakfast always, always. So I go to Billingsgate."

Right glad was Cotton, refreshed by the nepenthe of Paris, to go out and see the unknown city. Dulau took a basket, and started at a brisk pace, chattering all the way. His companion happened to mention the curious things in his room, and Dulau said—

"O yes. I buy them cheap when I see chance. Gentlemen know me. They come and say, 'Well, Dulau, anything fresh.' I pay shillings. I get pounds by-and-by—*livres*, you know."

The air seemed fresher in Trafalgar Square. Cotton stared round him with amazement. He was a born villager, and had never entered a town of above twenty thousand people, which seemed immense to him. He was as wonder-struck as was Virgil's shepherd when first he beheld Rome. The great towers of Westminster, as yet clear and bright in the sunny morning air, seemed to him miraculous. Dulau, delighted to act in the new situation of

guide to an Englishman who had never seen London, was garrulous and explanatory; but Cotton was a bad listener, and could do nothing but stare at the mighty massive forms around him. They stood on the beautiful bridge of Westminster and looked up and down the stream; and Cotton, who had known no river larger than the lovely flashing Engle, fruitful of trout, trembled at the might of imperial Thames, and remembered again his passion for seeing the world.

"There is air on this bridge," said Dulau, "and on that granite walk: they are almost worthy of Paris. Our river, the Seine—well, it is not like your Tamise, wide, but O, *parbleu*, its bridges! You in London have, like the Pont Neuf, nothing."

Cotton did not listen much to his chattering companion. A man of imaginative mind feels his brain open and expand as he gazes for the first time on something noble. The primal sight of a rose-tinged Alp, whose peak pierces the sky—of a wide river with vast ships upon it—of a great city throbbing with the life of millions—is a memory for ever. Cotton was so absorbed with the sight before him that Dulau had some difficulty in making him understand that the river steamer was approaching the pier.

They went on board, and Cotton got fresh air

enough. The little boat, with waspish energy, flashed down the stream, revealing to Cotton new marvels with every splash of her paddle wheels. Landing at London Bridge, Dulau led his companion to Billingsgate, there to be astounded by the graphic eloquence of the salesmen, and the beauty of the mighty salmon on the cool marble slabs.

"Fine fish!" said Dulau to the fishmonger, of whom he was purchasing a lobster for the breakfast, and some red mullet for the dinner of his illustrious incognito. It was a glorious salmon, of seventy pounds or so.

"Yes," said the other. "Grove's man has bespoke it for the Archbishop of Canterbury, who's got a big dinner at Lambeth to-day—not curates, you know, but Royalty and bigwigs. I'm one of those who object to the Church being disestablished. It would help to disestablish me!"

Dulau and Cotton took another steamer up the river. The summer morning was still peaceful and beautiful, though already a thin veil of smoke, from myriads of kitchen chimneys, was poised in the air like a giant cobweb. As the steamer shot under Waterloo Bridge, Cotton, standing at the stern, looking backward, was startled by a wild, despairing shriek, such as had never fallen on his ear before. He looked up, and saw a woman falling headlong

from the parapet into the river. It was the infinite division of an instant, yet her form was burnt on his brain, and he knew what it meant at a glance. He sprang from the deck into the water, and swam to her aid.

CHAPTER VIII.

VILLAGE GOSSIP.

“Jack on his alehouse bench has as many lies as a Czar.”

TENNYSON.

THE disappearance of Charles Cotton was a delightful topic of converse for the people of Englehurst village. His uncle Richard sat up late for him, and at last gave in, and went to bed with a happy conviction that something terrible had happened. The Plymouth Brother was like a certain famous Irishman—never happy unless he was miserable. He resolved to go and see the most eminent Plymouth Brother in the neighbourhood, one Granville, an insolvent linen-draper, the first thing next morning. So he went to bed, and wept himself asleep. When he arose, he walked straight to his erratic nephew's room, and beheld an untouched bed! Horror of horrors! Charles Cotton had not come home to sleep, which he might have done, as he always carried the key of a back entrance.

The Plymoth Brother was paralysed. He sat down to breakfast, ate a yard of bacon and a

dozen eggs, drank a quart of weak tea, and then set off, with tears in his eyes, to ask advice of Granville.

This Granville was an oddity. After failing conspicuously in many lines of business, he had fallen on his feet by marrying an elderly spinster who kept a girls' school. Although unsuccessful in matters secular, his fine fluency had made him a great light among the Brethren; and it was generally supposed that Miss Crowder, the proprietress of Hawker Academy, had accepted him as an advertisement. She kept him in perfect order. She curled his hair, limited his diet, told him exactly what to say at Bethesda Chapel. This same chapel, a quiet little building up a lane that seemed not to lead anywhere, was a great sorrow to the Rector (a firm believer in Apostolic Succession), and an immense amusement to the Squire. Mr. Englehurst, though a holder of very strong opinions, had not the slightest desire to force those opinions on other people. Indeed, his wish was rather the other way. He preferred being in the minority. He had an aristocratic idea that a gentleman ought to have a creed of his own quite different from that of ordinary people. He was the last man in the world to make a proselyte or vote with a party. So, when his good friend the Rector, a kid-gloved Ritu-

alist with a slight tendency towards the confessional, bemoaned the existence in Englehurst of this clique of Plymouth Brethren, the stalwart Squire laughed at him. The Reverend Vicesimus Wigney was the twentieth child of the Squire's college tutor, a fine old mathematician who married at forty-five, and found himself at seventy with a populous household. The Squire, taking pity on the perplexed old gentleman, did all he could to help him; and one thing he did was to give his son, Vicesimus, the Englehurst living. It was against his conscience, for he saw that Vicesimus Wigney was a weak young fellow, who would blindly follow any leader; but the Squire, as is too often the case, sacrificed his convictions in his desire to serve a friend. So Vicesimus got the living, which was a good one; and he played many foolish tricks, which old-fangled Englehurst understood not; and he was decidedly unpopular with the men, though the young women all adored him. He was fond of seeing his female parishioners in his study, and probing their consciences, and giving them pious advice; he had, moreover, an intense thirst for gossip, and loved nothing half so well as a cup of tea and a scandalous story. Once or twice he nearly got into serious difficulty in consequence of this tendency. Indeed, when he hawked about a villanous report, entirely

untrue, about Mr. Stanley Gay, that impulsive young quadrigarius was with much difficulty prevented from horsewhipping him.

Old Richard Cotton found his way down to Mrs. Granville's seminary just at the time when all the young female folk of Englehurst village were demurely tripping in that direction. It was a school for the children of farmers and tradespeople, where the diet was rough, but plentiful, and the teaching quite old-fashioned. There was French, of Stratford-atte-Bow, and Lindley Murray, and good plain needlework. Of course the piano had its way, much disturbing the pious lucubrations of Mr. Granville. However, it was a good sort of school for the class of girls who came there, whether as boarders or day-scholars; they got no new-fangled notions or ambitions, and went home contented to help their fathers in their shops, or their mothers in the dairy and the housework. There are a few country villages in which such schools remain; but it cannot be long before the rising wave of omniscience, fostered by the School Boards, will wash them away.

Richard Cotton was shown in to Mr. Granville. That luminary of theology, who looked very wise indeed, was in dressing-gown and slippers, with a black velvet skull-cap, and sat with pen and ink

before him. He looked rather like an elderly magpie. Two books were open before him—Luther's Commentary on the Galatians and Walker's Dictionary. He was in the highest spirits, for he had just been offered five pounds by a London publisher for a telling tract; and as a consequence, Mrs. Granville had been more than usually liberal with the bacon at his breakfast. Like all men of his class, he was fond of heavy eating. It may not be generally known that tracts are a particularly remunerative form of literature, both for author and publisher; and, sad to say, there are a good many fast young literary men who have no particular creed who make a very nice income by tract writing. I recollect Harry Keymer, when he went down to his maiden aunt in Northamptonshire, was moved almost to laughter by finding the dear old lady in tears over a tract called "The Converted Highwayman," which he had written to pay his holiday expenses. He was undecided whether to tell her that he wrote the tract or not. If he did the keen old lady might detect his hypocrisy. Unable to decide, he tossed up; heads, yes; tails, no. It was tails. So he said no word; and Miss Theodosia Keymer left all her money to the society which published that tract—with, however, the fortunate provision that they should continue to employ the inspired

pen of its gifted author. Harry has made five hundred a year out of tracts ever since.

"Sit down, Brother Cotton," said Granville, effusively. He had begun his painful labours by taking Martin Luther, and diluting him through the medium of Walker, and he was not altogether sorry to be interrupted. "You seem to be disturbed."

"Ay, indeed," quoth Cotton. "My nephew, Charles, has run away, or something. He was sent for up to the Hall last night, and he's never been seen since. What had I better do, Brother Granville?"

"Have you inquired at the Hall? Perhaps he was wanted to do some particular work early this morning, and the Squire kept him there. You know the Squire's always in a hurry."

"There now! What a thing it is to be a man of learning! My poor old head would never have thought of that! Of course, the boy's up at the Squire's at work."

"Better go and satisfy yourself," said Granville, oracularly; "though no doubt it is so."

Richard Cotton walked off at a slow pace to Englehurst Hall. He went round by the back entrance, and encountered a footman crossing the wide courtyard, on one side of which were the

stables and coach-houses, where many grooms were hissing at their work.

"Have you got my nephew, Charlie, up here?" he asked.

The footman, a Londoner, who knew nothing of the Englehurst villagers, gave him a supercilious stare, and said,

"Really I don't know anything about your nephew, old gent."

Just at that moment the Marquis de Castelcicala crossed the yard. Cis Englehurst had taken the fancy that hawking would be a pleasant amusement; so the Squire had set up a falconer; and bought hawks, which were now in course of training. Castelcicala was as fond of the sport as that loyal Italian of Boccaccio's who killed his pet falcon to entertain his lady-love, and it was his matutinal custom to look after the hawks. So he chanced to note the interview between Cotton and the footman, and inquired courteously of the old man what he wanted. Cotton, somewhat shy of the brilliant easy Italian, explained rather blunderingly.

"O," said the Marquis, catching his meaning at last; "young Charles Cotton is your nephew. He was here last night to see Mr. Englehurst, and went away again. Is he not gone to his work at the plumber and glazier's?"

Richard Cotton got more and more puzzled over this business; however, he thought he would go to Wrangel's, hoping to find his runaway nephew there. When he reached the place, he found the old plumber and glazier in a lovely temper, swearing at everybody, and especially at his daughters. He seemed quite delighted to have a new object on which to wreak his wrath, and turned upon poor old Cotton with absolute fury.

"Where's that rascally nephew of yours?" he exclaimed. "Why doesn't he come to his work? He's a bad lot, Dick Cotton. Here I've got a letter this morning from Mr. Laing, the new man over to Scudamore, saying that he behaved improperly to Miss Laing when he was over there to attend to the greenhouse yesterday. Nice thing for me, when I've always been respectable, to have a journeyman that insults ladies. And now, where is he? I should like to know; and all my work standing still."

"I never thought he would do well, father," said Sarah Wrangel. "He wouldn't go to Sunday-school, you know."

"Idle hussy!" cried the fierce old man, turning suddenly on his demure eldest daughter, and boxing her ears. "Be off with you to your work, you and your two sluts of sisters. How dare you come here talking to me!"

The girls hurried off in frightened fashion. Wrangel was excessively angry, because he thoroughly liked Charles Cotton, and had always thoroughly trusted him; and now, when Mr. Laing made a complaint against him, and he failed to come to work, Wrangel was perfectly puzzled. Cotton was his right hand; he could not execute half his orders without his help. The frightened girls fluttered their petticoats across the garden, and went quietly to their work.

"So he has not been here this morning," said Richard Cotton, timidly.

"Here! Not he. I don't want to see his face again; and you can tell him so if ever you set eyes on him. Good-bye. I can't stop to talk. I've got to do his work and my own too."

Richard Cotton walked off through the old-fashioned archway which led round to Wrangel's shop, and felt so extremely low that he thought he would have a glass of ale at the Five Horseshoes. It was for the worthy old Plymouth Brother an unusual dissipation; but there are times when the juice of malt has much to do with quieting the minds of men. He walked into the bar and sat down; and it was some little time after he had strengthened his soul with beer that he noted who else was in the bar, and what was the conversation. The monstrous

Jenkins was listening with a sort of stolid interest to a dapper young fellow, who was Mr. Laing's groom.

"She's run away, that's a fact," he said. "The governor's gone off to London to look for her. He suspects a young fellow that came over to mend the greenhouse windows."

"Cotton," said Jenkins.

"That's your man. He was talking to the girl in the greenhouse, I hear. She's a stupid sort of thing, that anybody might get over if he thought it worth while. I don't know whether they're gone off together, but it looks like it. If the glazier thinks he'll get some money from the governor, he's under a mistake. The governor wants all he's got, and twice as much more."

The groom buried his ruddy countenance in a pewter pot. Jenkins's female folk were listening with intense delight; Richard Cotton with horror and dismay. His brain was in a whirl. There was the damning fact that Charles was nowhere to be found, and now he heard that Miss Laing was missing, and supposed to be in his nephew's company. It was too much for the poor old boy, who could scarcely stagger to the door to walk homeward; but Jenkins, who had a sort of rough kindness about him, helped him on his way. The stout landlord

was going to his orchard to get some greengages for preserving.

The lady by courtesy called Mrs. Jenkins, and her sister, and her daughter, chattered freely when the busy landlord had departed.

"That conceited young upstart will come to no good," said Mrs. Jenkins. "I hate those prim hypocritical people."

"I never liked him, mamma," said Miss Jane, who was a careful student of the *Family Herald*. "He is one of those plausible persons who pretend to be virtuous when they are ready for any criminal action."

"Jane is right," said her stout and sentimental Aunt, enthusiastically. That Aunt was a gushing creature, with the sweet thoughts of seventeen in the palpitating bosom of seven and forty. "The wretch has enticed away that poor Miss Laing in the hopes of getting money from her father. O, it is only too plain! What a mercenary wretch he must be!"

Miss Jane, who at this very moment was doing her utmost to fascinate the Squire's head gardener—a fine fellow in his way, but rather too fast—entirely coincided. Of course, she suggested, nobody would think of that poor Miss Laing except for her money. Alack for luckless Jane!

"O wad some power the giftie gi'e us
To see oursels as others see us,"

cries Burns, and if Jane could have seen herself as that handsome wicked gardener saw her, she would have had a severe lesson. "A dumpy freckled little fool," was his confidential verdict upon her when a friend chaffed him about his flirtation.

"I wonder what Mr. Laing will do?" said the puffy Miss Sprowl, Mrs. Jenkins's sister. "Of course he will follow his daughter and bring her back. How old is the girl, I wonder? She is a gawky-looking thing, and might be any age from fifteen to twenty."

"She is nothing like twenty," said the *soi-disant* Mrs. Jenkins. "Upon my word, I'd no idea that young Cotton was such a scamp. Why, butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, you'd have said. And he so high and mighty, never entering a public-house, or standing anybody a glass of beer. It is laughable."

She laughed an unpleasant half-hysterical laugh. The poor woman, accepting with a brave spirit a miserably false position, had intervals of anguish which were almost too much for her endurance. I often wonder how it is that women of rather a fine type become the wives (ay, and even the mistresses) of bullies and cads. Is it that their imagination

transforms these men into something wholly different from what they really are? The man, a mere hulking brute; the woman, *almost* a lady, but with just that delicate difference which is so obvious to all true judges. What is it that makes these foolish women deliver themselves up, soul and body, for this world and the next, to brutal animals of a type that is swinish? I am often puzzled by that problem. There must be a reason for it, seeing there is a reason for all things in this infinite universe; but the reason is not easy to find.

Englehurst village, not usually a lively corner of the world, was in a great state of excitement over recent events. The burglary at the Hall, the escape of the burglars, the double disappearance of Charles Cotton and Miss Laing, furnished fine food for the lovers of gossip. They had not had such delightfully suggestive topics for ages. The tongues of all the villagers, men and women, boys and girls, were loosened; everybody talked, and no one listened; the babble of Babel could scarcely have surpassed this village charivari.

At twelve sharp, Mr. Stanley Gay's coach changed horses at the Five Horseshoes. You might hear the blast of the guard's horn a couple of miles away, when the wind was south. His route was just twenty miles, from Palmerstown to Castleton: a pleasant

road all through, with undulating common land, and hills crowned with beech woods, and the river Engle crossing the way at intervals. Mr. Gay drove *con amore*; liked horses that could go and passengers that could enjoy their drive; chaffed the people on the road with a buoyant humour; and kept grooms and ostlers up to the mark by uttering in a sonorous voice what may be called the lout-language of this happy land. Boast as we may of our advanced civilisation, nobody can deny that we have an unmanageable proletariat, to use an expressive Roman phrase, which exists *procreandae prolis gratia*. You give such people votes, and immediately (*vide* Norwich and Boston) they try to sell them; you give them duties, for doing which they will be paid, and they do their utmost to shirk them. Such people cannot live in large towns where there is immense activity, without coming in due time into the clutches of the police. But in small towns and country places they are rampant, and live by inexplicable means. Jenkins had a lot of such fellows hanging about his place, and when Mr. Stanley Gay arranged to change horses there, he carelessly engaged some of those unhelpful louts. He soon discovered his mistake.

The coach drove up, a team of bright bays, just as the village clock (which, kept by the Rev. Vicesimus's watch, was seldom right) struck twelve. It

was a very new clock indeed; and its maker, one SMITH, had put his name upon it in aggressive brazen letters, and it struck on that bell of the church which was also used for tolling for the dead.

"That isn't twelve, it's a funeral," said Gay, as he threw the reins on his leaders' backs, and glanced at the chronometer on the footboard. "That precious clock of Smith's is too fast, like your parson, who writes me letters to say that a four-in-hand coach demoralises his parish. Now, Davis, wheelers. Davis, those oats are not up to sample. Come into Palmerstown to-morrow, and bring the lot."

"To-morrow's Sunday," growled Davis; "I'm not paid to work on Sunday."

"All right. You can leave this evening. I'll send a man over in a fly to take your place. Leaders! Hallo, Jenkins, what have you got there?"

The orbicular landlord was waddling down from his orchard with a huge basket of greengages.

"Bring 'm here," cried Gay.

"Just as you like, sir," said the landlord, calculating how much he should charge for them.

"If you'd any sense," said Gay, "you'd bring out some sherry and biscuits. Never mind: fruit's wholesomer. Guard, hand them up to the ladies and gentlemen outside. *Pull up!*"

Away went the coach, to the admiration of the crowd. There was always a crowd, what with Jenkins's regiment of idlers, and the children just out of school; but on this occasion there was a larger number than usual, for the air was full of rumour and fiction, and all the little Englehurst world was wondering what next would happen. A good many of the bystanders adjourned to the bar, where Mrs. Jenkins and her sister and daughter were inside, ready to make themselves agreeable, and to supply them with salted beer. Old Spike was there, leaning upon crutches, like the devil on two sticks; he had grown hoary in iniquity, and seemed to enjoy it. Give him a long clay pipe and a pot of beer, and he was perfectly happy. If he had an immortal soul, he certainly did not know it, and would rather have been without so unmanageable a possession. The same may be said of the stout and stolid Jenkins, that man-mountain, in whose vast volume there was not room for a soul as big as a flea. This, by the way, leads to the difficult metaphysical question whether a soul can occupy space—a problem which I leave to the hair-splitting speculators who try to calculate what number of angels can dance on the point of a needle. Jenkins was on this occasion as sulky as a bear with a sore ear—not at all an unusual condition with him.

He had lost his greengages; his ostler, who had acted under his orders in reference to the oats, had received his discharge; and he, who bullied everybody over whom he had any control, felt a sad loss of personal dignity when treated by Gay as the mere scum of the earth. The sole thing that gave him any satisfaction was the disappearance of Charles Cotton, whom he hated with an unreasoning hatred.

Wrangel, who seldom left his workshop, was among the company in the bar to-day, as savage as possible, since Cotton's sudden absence had prevented his doing a lot of necessary work. And another visitor was the unfathomable and reticent Redi, who was much amused with the dull scandal-mongers of an English village, wholly devoid of the ready invention of the quick-witted Italians.

"I won't have that Gay changing horses here much longer," said Jenkins. "He thinks he's everybody. I'm as good as he is, any day."

"I should think so," said Mrs. Jenkins's shrill harsh voice. "He's nobody, that ever I heard of, and you're pretty well known in the county. If a man pays his way he's as good as any other man."

"Of course he is," said Asmodeus Spike. "These fellows with their four-in-hands want to ride over us. They won't do it, though. Now that Dr. Kenealy

has started his Magna Charta, we shall soon be free; and them aristocrats will have to give up the property that belongs to the people. Why, what's Squire Englehurst done that he should own all the land about here?"

"Ay, what indeed?" quoth Jenkins. "Much good he does in these parts. O, that there Doctor Kenealy! He and old Garry" (affectionate term for Garibaldi) "are the only right good uns now-a-days. Why, do you know, mates, one evening when I was coming down from London there were a lot of swells in the carriage that swore I must be Sir Roger. I never felt so proud in my life."

At this moment another four-in-hand passed the bow window of the bar at the Five Horeshoes. It was the Squire, with pretty Cis beside him, and a couple of powdered footmen on the back seat, sitting as immoveable as the Sphinx.

"Look at those slaves!" hissed Spike. "Fancy having to wear flour in your hair, and to sit like a wax figure! Slaves I call them. Suppose they think their master the finest fellow in the world."

"They're paid to do it," said the landlord. "Money goes a long way. I suppose that little stuck-up creature on the box 'll marry a lord, or some such thing."

"She isn't at all pretty," said Miss Sprowl.

"I call her ugly," said Jane.

Redi listened to this conversation with much amusement. Presently the talk turned upon Cotton, for whom nobody seemed to have a good word. It was voted at last that he had run away with Mr. Laing's daughter as well as the Squire's diamonds.

"He'll be caught," said Spike.

"Do you think he will?" asked Redi.

"Certain. He can't get away from our detectives. He'll be brought back and tried, you'll see. Serve him right. I hate a thief."

Nobody made any comment on this last remark, though all present were aware that no greater thief than Spike could be found in the county.

Leaving these gossiping dolts, let us follow Mr. Stanley Gay, who has reached Castleton, seen in the London coach, which is twenty minutes later than his own, and sat down to a well-spread lunch at the Castle Hotel. He was in high spirits, notwithstanding the insubordination of his idiotic stablemen. He has a pleasant epicurism about him, and expatiates eloquently on the fitness of a glass of Pommery and Greno with a slice of ham. One of the passengers is a man with a grievance; he had taken the box-seat, and was obliged to give way to a lady. *Place aux dames* was Mr. Stanley Gay's guiding rule; besides, when you are driving four-in-

hand, how charming it is to have a lovely lady on the near side, ready to admire your capital management of the whip, and the delicate way in which you manipulate that off leader with the tender mouth! So it was scarcely to be expected that Mr. Stanley Gay should allow an elderly duffer to sit by his side when he could be cheered by the companionship of beauty; and this Palmerstown magnate (I believe he was a grocer and Town Councillor) had to sit behind and look sulky all the time. But he could not help cheering up when luncheon was served at the Castle, and Mr. Gay said—

“Very sorry, old fellow, that you couldn’t have the box. Ladies must have their way, as I dare say you know, if you’re married—and you look married. Let’s have a glass of dry champagne together. And look here, you may have my seat driving back. Will that suit you?”

That highly respectable inhabitant of Palmerstown looked as if he would rather not. And he didn’t.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PURLOINED LETTER.

RAPHAEL: How sudden moments spoil the work of centuries!
Do trifles rule the world?

ASTROLOGOS: In faith, they do, my lord.

A butterfly may upset a dynasty.

A pretty girl may make a realm Republican.

ALOUETTE: A pretty girl's no trifle, you must own, papa.

The Comedy of Dreams.

CASTELCICALA, awaking early, ordered out Red Roland, a noble horse that the Squire had placed at his service, and rode across the fells to Garston Mere. He wanted to think out fully the game he was playing; and he found that to stimulate thought there is nothing like rapid motion through solitary places. Thought of a certain sort comes freely enough in society; Parliament is the hotbed of eloquence, and the dinner-table of wit; but the ideas thus generated are not a man's own—they belong to the company. He happens to express what everybody is thinking. If you want to get at your very own ideas, gentle reader—and they are much harder to read than other people's—linger on lonely moor or in silent wood and question your soul. The

Divine Powers shun society; the music of Apollo's lute is hushed when the devil blows the bagpipes of politics, and turns the hurdy-gurdy of scandal.

All men who think know this; men who merely think they think are ignorant of it. The Marquis rode his horse to the margin of the mere, and left him to graze, knowing that he would come at call, and lay upon the virgin turf, full of thyme and heather, and looked upon the wide calm water. How perfect a calm! No wind rippled the lake—the trees upon its islets seemed asleep. Wordsworth's vision of the swans on Saint Mary's Lake was realised: they scarcely moved upon the water, and their reflex was so clear that the swan of the lake might have been mistaken for the swan in upper air. The pendulous silver-rinded birch trees on the margin were mirrored to a leaf; and if Castelvicala had seen a mermaid combing her hair on one of the islets, or beheld the turrets of a drowned city far down in the depths of the lake, he was not in the mood to be surprised.

However, nothing happened. His horse nibbled the short sweet grass enjoyingly. The Marquis unconsciously thought over the complex business where-with he was concerned.

"Odd," he reflected, "that a kind of electric chain binds the strongest brain in Europe to the

brainless flabby landlord of a small village inn, neither knowing it. Odd that the attempt to steal a girl's jewels should give me the key to the mystery that has perplexed me so long. Ah! I shall now have my revenge—on both."

"After all," he thought, having watched a wind-hover high above the mere, "it is hardly worth while to care for revenge. What I do is for Italy. Italy, in its infinite glory of the future, can forget traitors and cowards—can forgive its enemies. Still I like the idea of spoiling that fellow's game just as he thought he had checkmated me."

In the beauty of the morning the unharmonious topic tired him; so he closed his eyes to "make pictures," and he opened them to see pictures. That stretch of lovely lake! Its tranquil beauty gave him strange delight; and he forgot his enemies and enigmas; and thought only of Cis Englehurst. She was no "phantom of delight," but the prettiest simplest maiden that ever laughed through life.

"She likes my love-songs," thought Castelvicala, "and she likes my talk; and she looks at me with pure changeful unawakened eyes, that seem to say, 'Give me a soul, please. I could love you if I had a soul.' Will the right man come to give her a soul? It seems to me that I have not the magnetic power. Yet is she just the very girl that I could

love to death, and beyond. I remember the old West Country ballad on the question of sex I got hold of years ago. It had one good verse:—

‘What’s the odds ’twixt we and they?
Anybody can tell it thus:
We and they each wants our own way;
We loves they, and they laughs at us.’

Were I to go and tell an amorous tale to little Cis, in earnest fashion, she’d laugh in my face. Faith, I won’t try. She’s as difficult as Horace’s Chloë, *hinnuleo similis*. I’ll allure her with amorous gaieties, and see what comes thereof:—

‘And if she will she will, you may depend on’t,
And if she won’t she won’t, and there’s an end on’t.’”

The Marquis was perfectly right in his judgment of Cecilia Englehurst’s character. She was in no way precocious. We are just now in an age of development, noticeable in every region of life. Ben Jonson wrote:—

“Ere, *cherries ripe!* and *strawberries!* be gone,
Unto the cries of London I’ll add one;
Ripe, statesmen, ripe! They grow in every street,
At six-and-twenty, ripe.”

If we could resuscitate rare Ben Jonson, how amused would he be at the ripeness of our modern state boys! Why, even the girls in their teens talk politics. Ay, but *are* they girls? or tomboys of a

new description, developed by laws as yet unanalysed by Darwin? The true unsuspicious innocent girl develops into the perfect lady, as the rose-bud to the rose; but the girl of coarser growth, who, a generation or two ago, would have become an ordinary hoyden, is now a literary, or scientific, or theological hoyden. She rushes madly into the arms of a weak publisher with her silly experiences in the form of a novel; or of a weak professor with admiration for his hasty intuitions; or of a weak curatè, with a wild eagerness to confess her sins and receive sacerdotal absolution.

American writers, as might be expected, accept the theory, that each generation transcends the last, with perfect satisfaction. For example, I find Oliver Holmes, the Autocrat of the Breakfast Table, in an address to a literary society, speaking thus:—"Each generation strangles and devours its predecessor. The young Feejeean carries a cord in his girdle for his father's neck; the young American, a string of syllogisms or propositions in his brain to finish the same relation. The old man says: 'Son, I have swallowed and digested the wisdom of the past.' The young man says: 'Sire, I proceed to swallow and digest thee and all thou knowest.'" This is a humorous account of an age whose foible is omniscience; but both son and sire are mere smat-

terers, and have no real knowledge after all. For the only real knowledge is from experience. Books and pictures are good as guides merely, showing you where to find the real thing. Much of our modern science is of the same value as the bird-lore of a person who, having been informed that a robin has a red breast, should never trouble himself to look at the bird and verify the fact. Any chemist can tell you how to make that tremendous explosive agent, chloride of nitrogen, but is there one alive who has made it? A man who has thoroughly explored one English county is a better geographer than if his head contained all the facts in M'Culloch's Dictionary.

Castelcicala rode home slowly. His horse's hoofs brought fragrance from the trampled thyme, and a myriad larks made music in the air, while now and then there came a plover's cry; but with an unlifted eye, he rode quietly toward Englehurst Hall, with the picture of the glassy unrippled loch still delighting his mind. The power of imprinting a beautiful scene on the mental retina, so as to recall it in days far remote, is a gift worth having; and not fair landscapes only can be thus traced on the mind's eye, but beautiful faces, made more beautiful by friendship. This is a development of the memory which grows by practice. I have cheered many a sleepless

night and dull journey by conjuring up snowy peaks and shining streams, and dim green valleys—by summoning “old familiar faces” in a mood less melancholy than Charles Lamb’s. The scenes pass like a celestial panorama; the faces are those of visiting angels.

The road from the moor to Englehurst crosses that which comes from Scrutton station; and at the juncture the Marquis’s attention was attracted by the trot of a pony. It was ridden by a stable-boy from the Hall, who went to and fro for the letters. The Marquis hailed him, looked at the bag, which had a lock, but the key had long been lost, saw at a glance that for himself there were three letters, and then returned the bag to the lad without taking his own correspondence.

“This will make assurance doubly sure,” he said to himself.

The stable-boy had cantered on, and the Marquis walked Roland home indolently. When he reached the breakfast-room he found only the Squire. A pleasant room, that summer breakfast-room, with two large bay windows opening on a velvety lawn, and a rose-garden just beyond, with a fountain sparkling in the midst of it. In one of the window bays the table was set, and there was a quaint contrast in the arrangement. By the Squire’s cover was

a silver tankard of the famous Englehurst ale; by the Marquis's, a slim bottle of light wine; by Cis Englehurst's, a delicate tea equipage of eggshell china.

"I saw you riding up the avenue, Marquis," said the Squire. "You seemed in no hurry."

"I had ample time. Red Roland took me at a grand pace across Garston Moor to the Mere. What a lovely lake that is, in the perfect quiet of such a summer morning as this!"

"Yes, I'm very proud of that beautiful bit of my estate. There are some queer legends about it. They say that on Saint John's Eve, at midnight, a procession of female spectres cross the lake—victims of some wicked forefather of mine. You should ask Lancel about these traditions; he has ferreted out a lot of queer old MSS., that I have never had time to read. It would make him eternally happy if you were to show an interest in his researches."

"I have found him rather taciturn."

"The Abbé is proud," replied the Squire. "A man of great genius, and a brilliant mathematical discoverer, he is content to be the curator of my library. He is an obstinate Legitimist, and would not set foot on French soil unless the white flag floated again. I have been told he is a Jesuit and an intriguer, but that is all rubbish. He works at my library and at his own mathematics about six-

teen hours a day. He can talk well, but he is too proud to talk familiarly with anyone whose station is nominally superior to his own, without special invitation."

"A man worth intimate knowledge. I shall ask him to unlock your historic treasures for my benefit this very morning. But where is Miss Englehurst?"

"Cis, you hussy," cried the Squire from the open window, "where are you? We want our tea."

Cis came tripping over the lawn from the rose-garden, in a simple pink morning dress, with snowy frills about her dainty throat and bosom. Her apron was full of choice roses. Her face was flushed, and her eyes brightened with the fresh morning air. She looked a daughter of the morning—a happy younger sister of the rosy-fingered Dawn. She flung down her roses, and kissed her sire, and shook hands with the Marquis, and exclaimed,

"I didn't know I was late. I thought I had only been five minutes cutting these flowers."

"With all things lovely time flies fast," said the Marquis.

"Oh, you may flatter me as much as you please," said Cis, "you can't make me much vainer than I am. I see in my glass a pretty little figure; and I feel that I ought to be pretty . . . to please papa."

The Marquis laughed.

"To please papa! Mayn't a few other folk be pleased also?"

"O dear, yes. But now have some tea. And try those kidneys; I assure you our cook does them delightfully. I am sure the kind of breakfast you eat can *not* be wholesome."

The Marquis was eating figs, for which the Squire's gardens were so famous that they often tempted beccaficas across the sea, and drinking Liebfraumilch. The Squire had not yet commenced his breakfast; he was looking through letters and telegrams which referred to the burglary. He said nothing about them in his daughter's presence, but passed them on to Castalcicala, who discovered soon enough that only one of them contained any information. This was a letter from Scotland-yard, stating that two dexterous thieves had been observed by a detective near Charing Cross, one carrying a bag. They came down through Trafalgar Square, and went over to the railway station. One, well-known as the Parson, was dressed in a clerical suit; the other looked like his servant. They walked straight into the Charing Cross Hotel, whither the detective followed them; but amid the passages of the hotel and station he had lost sight of them.

That these were the men was clear to the Marquis, from the description; and he was not at all

surprised that, if they noticed a detective following them, they contrived to elude him in that Charing Cross labyrinth. The noble society of thieves keep private detectives of their own, to watch the detectives; and an officer of police never goes out in plain clothes without an officer of thievery being set to watch him. If Slippery Jack heard a certain shrill whistle as they passed Morley's Hotel, it would warn them of the presence of a detective. To walk boldly into the Charing Cross Hotel would be the Parson's natural tactic; and anybody who knows the ground will see that there would then be a dozen ways of escape.

The Squire, having finished his pile of letters, made a breakfast worthy of a squire of the old type—cold round of beef, cold grouse, a tankard of old ale. As to Cis, well, she breakfasted daintily, in young ladylike fashion—eating some delicate omelet, and drinking the tea of Assam. There was one letter by her plate, but she did not open it. It was from a young "person"—the word *lady* would not apply—who had been received very kindly at Englehurst Hall, and who had begged Cis Englehurst to help somebody who was in distress. This she had asked her father to do, believing the piteous plausible tale; but accidentally it was discovered that the somebody in distress was the young person her-

self. Now the young person, to whom it was discovered the game was by no means new, was writing fluent letters to Cis, with a new lie in each letter. Cis Englehurst, shocked to the heart that she had ever given sisterly confidence to a person who, though moving in good society, was an accomplished swindler, opened none of her letters.

At the Marquis's right hand lay *two* letters, also unopened. When he met the stable-boy that morning he had seen three. He smiled quite a pleasant smile when he saw the letters on the white tablecloth; for he took delight in move and counter-move, in all the difficulties of a delicate game of skill. Not till the Squire's correspondence had passed through his hands did he take up and scrutinise the two letters which lay beside him; they were both from abroad, and both from ladies.

"You do not seem to care much about your letters," said Cis.

"I know all that is in them beforehand. They are from ladies."

"Do you mean to say," she asked, "that ladies' letters are never worth the trouble of reading?"

"O dear, no," he said, with a laugh. "Write me a letter, Miss Englehurst, and I will read it as long as the paper lasts. But one of my correspondents is a scientific lady, who has discovered something or

other that I cannot understand, and indeed would rather not; while the other is a political lady, who thinks the Pope ought to be assassinated. Besides, they both cross."

He tore open the envelope, and showed her. They *did* cross, terrifically.

"Read them if you like," he said. "I never shall."

As one was in Russian and the other in Danish, Miss Englehurst declined.

"I rode over to Garston Mere this morning," he said. "That lake is delicious in the tranquil majesty of sunrise. Every spray of the woods around was delicately doubled in its unrippled water. I was reminded of some verses by a poet of my country, which I tried to turn into English years ago.

'What sees the swan in that clear mirror bright?

Another swan as white.

What sees the hawk on his aërial throne?

A hawk in deeps unknown.

What sees the girl braiding her wave-drench'd hair?

A girl almost as fair.

What sees the lover passionate and true?

You, lovely maiden, you."

"That is very pretty," she said. "I don't think our English poets say anything so elegant as you Italians. But poetry is all nonsense, you know. Good-bye."

She went away into the rose garden for more spoils. The Squire followed her with happy eyes. If she had lost her diamonds, was she not queen of the diamonds herself? A very sunbeam was Cis Englehurst.

The Squire and the Marquis had a talk over their correspondence.

"Those fellows have been so closely tracked," said the Marquis, "that they ought now to be run to earth. If you don't think it unwise interference on my part, I'll go up to town to-day, and see if I cannot quicken the intellects of those gentlemen in Scotland Yard. I am far from questioning the capacity of your English detective police, but they generally rise from the ranks by sheer force of genius, and have had no special training. Hence an unusual case perplexes them. I have had occasion to employ several of them, and uncommonly clever I found them; regular anthropologists, if they once saw a man they never forgot him. The man who caught the murderer Manning in Jersey, for example—that was real divination. There was a faint trace of Manning to Jersey; this fellow went over, but could get no clue; till one night, in a public-house, a little girl came in for a bottle of brandy. 'What a lot of brandy your lodger drinks!' said the landlady; 'that's his third bottle to-day.'

'That's my man,' thought the detective—and it was. But in this case of ours there are complications which require delicate treatment; and I am inclined to think that we may not only get hold of the scoundrels and punish them, but also get some of the jewels back. Shall I try?"

"I shall be thoroughly obliged to you if you will. I don't care about the value of the things, but I hate being robbed."

"So do I," said the Marquis. "I will go up this afternoon. There is a capital train at four, and I want to go and talk to the Abbé, whose reticent originality piques me."

"All right," said the Squire. "I shall see you again. I am going to take Cis for a gallop."

"Then I'll come and put her in her saddle," said Castalcicala.

Which he did: and father and daughter rode off through the sunny air, as fine examples of the English race in two different forms as could be found anywhere. The Squire was as well set up as a colonel of horse; his daughter was as refined and dauntless as any princess. He was only an English country gentleman: but to be an English country gentleman is, even in these days, something.

Meanwhile the Marquis, having gladdened his eyes with the beautiful child riding away on her

bay mare by her father's side, went to see the Abbé. There he sat in the library, tranquil and macilent, poring over papers on which multitudinous algebraic symbols appeared. He was just on the verge of something that should supersede Sir William Hamilton's theory of quaternions—but the crystallising inspiration was wanting. So the Abbé, waiting for the electric current, was not very amiable. Castalcicala found him more reticent than usual.

The Marquis cared not. He was a sanguine Italian Liberal, with full belief that Italy was the greatest nation in the world. He had once written a pamphlet (worthy of Mr. Gladstone's consideration) to prove that Homer was born in Corsica—and that in Achilles Pelides he prophesied of the great Corsican, Napoleon Buonaparte. He drew the Abbé out in time; and they soon fell upon a pleasant discursive talk about the history of the House of Englehurst; and it was clear the Abbé had made wonderful collections from the forgotten stores in that ancient library.

"Here," he said, "is an old black-letter rhyme, with an illuminated initial. The initial was a green islet on a blue lake, with an angel above in menacing flight through air; the legend was:—

"When an island rises on Garston Mere,
End of the Englehurst is near."

"There was no island there this morning," said the Marquis, laughing, "so the Englehurst will last another day."

They had much more chat together, the Marquis wishing to ascertain whether the Abbé was, as rumoured, a Jesuit; but he very soon came to the conclusion that this was quite a mistake, and that Lancel's love for abstract mathematics would keep him quite clear of mystic absurdities. Geometry brightens the brain; and Euclid, much as Professor Sylvester hates him, is an author from whom a young lady might learn more than from half-a-dozen young ladyish novels. And one who has once mastered the notion that the three angles of a triangle are always equal to two right angles, would scarce condescend to notice the triangular questions which have recently been puzzling the Old Catholics and their impulsive English allies.

After a pleasant chat with the Abbé Lancel, whom he had never before tried to cultivate, Castalcicala went to his own apartment, and rang for Redi.

"I am going to London this afternoon," he said, "pack just enough for two nights."

"You will not require me, Excellency," he said.

"No; I go to a friend, whose house is small. I want to inquire about this robbery, to which we seem to have a clue."

"A clue!" said the valet, surprised.

"A trifling one, but in such a case trifles must not be lost sight of. Send any letters that may arrive to-day or to-morrow to the hotel. By-the-way, I fully expected one of much importance this morning, but it has not arrived. Be sure to send it on; it is from Signor Corsi, whose handwriting you know very well."

"The Signor is in London?"

"No, at Brighton, whence perhaps the delay. I hope he will meet me in town, as he goes back to Italy next week."

"To Italy, Excellency! Then is there anything prepared? Will there be decisive action at last?"

"I hope so, for it is almost time. Corsi goes to Rome, I know, and the letter which I expected was to tell me his plans when there. No matter; doubtless we shall meet in London."

The Squire and his daughter returned to lunch with appetites such as a gallop over a breezy moor is apt to produce.

"I wouldn't give Garston Moor and Mere for as many acres of the city of London, Marquis. The

pure air you breathe there is the best medicine in the world."

"You and Miss Englehurst both show it," he said. "England is a rare place for beautiful complexions, but I know where the finest I have seen may be found."

"What a flatterer you are, Marquis!" said Cecilia, laughing. "Handsome is that handsome does, a governess of mine used to warn me. I am sure it must have been a consolatory proverb, poor thing, for she was one of the plainest persons I ever saw. Wasn't she, papa?"

"She was no beauty, certainly. Her figure reminded one of a child's wooden doll. But didn't we hear she got married, Cis?"

"O yes, married very well—to a highly respectable grocer in Bridgwater. I'm sure she ought to be able to keep his accounts, for she had a perfect mania for teaching me arithmetic, and I never could learn the multiplication-table. Now when the Abbé used to give me lessons in geometry, I used to see what he meant at once, even though his explanations were all in French, which he said was the language of mathematics."

"Do you think the Abbé, who is so strong a Legitimist, has any political correspondence?" said Castalcicala to the Squire.

"I know he has. The Chambord party have great belief in his ability. He writes and receives numerous letters in cypher. It does not concern me, and I suppose it amuses him."

"With all this wonderful correspondence, why don't you lock your letter-bag?" asked the Marquis, laughing.

"O, it's no affair of mine; I never lost a letter in my life. But how about your train? Cis shall drive you to the station in her pony-carriage if you like. I'm obliged to see my bailiff about something."

Castelcicala found the arrangement only too pleasant, and would have liked to prolong the drive behind the lively little chestnuts. When they parted, he said,

"Tell your papa I shall bring him a present from town—a new post bag, with a Hobbs lock."

CHAPTER X.

LONDON.

ASTROLOGOS.—If London be the world's most noble city, then
 Who dwells therein should be no common citizen,
 The world's most noble title, greater far than all
 Dukes, but not *duces*, Earls not free from churlishness,
 Should be the sounding civic name of Londoner.

RAPHAEL.—Lofty ideal! But the race of cockneys are
 As commonplace a set as you'll see anywhere;
 A race that loves the billiard-room and music-hall,
 And tripe and onions, and hot spirits afterward.

ASTROLOGOS.—Wait, Count, until you meet a perfect Londoner,
 A man who knows that City's penetralia,
 Master of fashion, politics, and gaiety,
 Swimmer on summit wave of choice society.
 A Londoner, my lord, is not *faex Londoni*;
 He lives in Clubland, gossips at the Travellers',
 Checkmates a Bishop at the Athenæum; and
 Loiters away to play whist at the Arlington.
 Dining alone, his dinner is a work of art;
 And, dining out, his wit turns meal to festival.
 Always himself, cool, easy, careless, nonchalant,
 Whether he helps a fair Princess to strawberries
 (Bright eyes may languish under Royal eyelashes)
 Or heads a merry crew to Richmond, wondering
 Which they like best, the Heidseck or the nightingales.

ALOUETTE.—Papa, I should so like to know a Londoner.

The Comedy of Dreams.

ALL roads lead to Rome. It might have been
 true once, that saying; but now-a-days all roads lead

to London. Aspiring poet, with epic or drama; youthful politician, with a tongue to sell and a party to choose; peer of the realm, embarrassed by too much money; swindler, with a diamond mine in the Herzegovina; pretty heiress, who can be content with nothing less than a Duke; young woman from the country, who thinks the kitchen of a lodging-house more charming than the meadows where she has been wont to milk deep-uddered kine—all these go to London.

“Non cuivis homini contingit adire Corinthum,”

says Horace. True, no doubt; but your modern Londoner altogether outdoes the Corinthian. For wisdom and folly, pleasure and anguish, goodness and wickedness, beauty and hideousness, force and feebleness—for all the contrasts of humanity—London is unrivalled. And to be a true Londoner is to know the highest sublimity and the deepest abasement possible to mankind. Your cool citizen of the world's chief city, amazed at nothing, amused by everything, analyses and appraises a speech by Disraeli or Kenealy, a poem by Browning or Gibbs, even as the citizens of Athens judged Aristophanes and Alcibiades. Your true Londoner is a man of infinite possibilities, who carefully avoids performance. He is a man who *could* do anything he pleased

to absolute perfection; but he does not choose to do anything. His mission is to criticise those who do imperfectly what he could do perfectly, were it only worth his while. It is not. London is to him a theatre; he takes a perpetual stall, and calmly watches the gradual development of the marvellous drama of life, in which every scene is a surprise, in which nothing is certain but the unforeseen.

The City crucible condenses intellect; and the man who knows his London knows a good deal of humanity. It is a curiously special art. Captain Webb could never have swum the Channel if his bones were not light, if his tendency were not somewhat adipose. This I say with certainty, never having seen him or heard anything of his physique. Similarly, a man cannot be a thorough Londoner unless his brain is light enough to float nautilus-like on the surface of the social tide, unless his resistant power is strong enough to defy the scandal of dowagers and the epigrams of rivals. No Englishman is educated who has not known London. It is the only absolute university. We all graduate there, from statesman to burglar, from poet to penny-a-liner. But London should be strictly regarded as a University. No man should remain in it regularly after the time when his intellect comes of age, which is somewhere about forty. When that terrible eighth lustrum

arrives (terrible only to the precocious, who are hardened cynics at five and twenty), try life in the country. See London at intervals. Don't let the swift world slip by and leave you far behind the ideas of the time. They may not be brilliant or original ideas, but it is just as well to know them. The recitatives of Tyndall and Huxley and Darwin are not to me as the songs of Homer and Shakespeare; "the words of Mercury are harsh after the songs of Apollo;" but let us learn what these prosy gentry have to say, lest by any means we should miss some great saying of a nobler kind. London cannot be an insignificant city while Robert Browning and Thomas Carlyle are among its inhabitants; but, alas! how long is it since either poet or philosopher gave us a new thought, or even the old thought newly put? London, to say once more what I said at first, is the University of the world; it attracts the rarest loveliness and the vilest ugliness, the ablest rogue and the most absolute fool.

It amuses and instructs to compare London with Paris. Was it Coleridge who said that France is a monarchy, with a Republic for its capital? Paris does not represent France in the least degree, whereas London is merely intensified England. The country squire has his park: so has the Londoner, and they are Royal parks—therefore the heritage of the people.

As every country gentleman may, some day or other, be Lord Lieutenant, or at least High Sheriff, so every civic Londoner may become Lord Mayor, every West End Londoner the leader of fashion, a far higher dignity. The country squire examines with great care his hot-houses, pinneries, melon-pits, vineries, carp ponds: it is a daily pleasure to him. The Londoner finds the fairest of all fruit in Covent Garden, and the freshest of all fish in Billingsgate. Nor is this all. If you love good pictures, rare old books, quaint and suggestive, fine wine, enticing comestibles, try to learn London. There is one street in which you shall find delicious song birds; and another in which carved oak furniture abounds; and another in which you may pick up an *editio princeps*; and another in which glass is elegant and cheaply to be bought. I might run through an interminable catalogue. London is simply the Microcosm, and to an uncultured stranger fresh from the country London was not easily intelligible. Charles Cotton had not only intelligence, but that far higher faculty—imagination. To understand London when you first see it, the work of a well-trained intelligence, is no trivial matter; but to comprehend it before seeing it, and even if you never see it, tests the great imaginative faculty—the king of the brain. It can be done: else how could Homer tell us all we need to know of

Troy, which he never saw till the mighty son of Peleus had long passed to the fields of asphodel? Troy had its Piccadilly and its Park Lane. London hath its Hector and its Paris. Even Cressida—— but at this delicate point I pause.

Charles Cotton, a mere villager, was much perplexed by his first vision of London. But he soon grew in mental culture to understand it. Fools do not grow in mental culture. A dull fellow, who has been carefully educated, will break down under a new situation. It is not so with a man, however uneducated, who possesses imaginative vitality. To Charles Cotton, London was a home. He saw that he could always live in a city with such infinite requirements. Gay and joyous in the consciousness of perfect health and easy capacity for work, he made up his mind that London was an oyster easy to open, and with a pearl a safe find therein. He laughed at difficulty. He plunged into the perilous London ocean, an unaccustomed swimmer, with the certainty that the time would come for him to feel at home in those troublous waters. He took his header into London life as readily as into the London river when he saved a poor young girl from drowning.

She was a tall fair woman of nearly thirty, with abundant yellow hair of that colour which it is the

foolish fashion to imitate by dyeing. She was got on board the steamer, and speedily resuscitated, for hers was a strong constitution, and the daring plunge had done her little harm. Then came the questions, Who was she? What to do with her? Legally, she ought to have been given into custody for an attempt to commit suicide, but the captain of the steamer was a kind-hearted fellow, and desired to evade the law on that point. The young woman, when brought to herself, was sulky; nothing would she say about herself, and the skipper began to get tired of her obstinacy. Cotton, who had been arrayed in a spare suit of the worthy commander's clothes, much too small for him everywhere except the waist, suggested that Monsieur Dulau should for the present take charge of her. He had a kind of intuition that he should not have fished this woman out of the Thames unless she was intended to be of some use to him. There was not much time for discussion on board a river steamer; wherefore, as Cotton was impulsive, and Dulau passive, and the captain in a devil of a hurry, it resulted in the fair-haired suicide being landed at Westminster in the best costume that could be arranged for her. She did not look elegant, though naturally what would be styled a fine woman. Nobody looks particularly charming in another fellow's clothes. This is true of the male sex, as I have

proved, having, wet through up in the Lakes, been glad to wear the togs of a jolly Westmoreland landlord, about five feet high, and almost the same in breadth. I was a boy of nineteen, six feet in my socks, and thin as a lath. Guy as I was, and much as the lasses laughed to see me, I enjoyed my broiled mutton ham and claret, and my bed of fresh heather, and was quite ready for char at breakfast. But nobody can quite carry off unfitting apparel, and this poor girl, clad in some raiment which belonged to the captain's wife, accidentally left on board, looked perfectly unhappy. She probably wished her attempt at suicide had been a success.

Dulau and Cotton hurried her into a cab and drove home. Dulau was not happy in his mind about it. He wondered what would his wife say or think. Had he not regarded Cotton as a *protégé* of the Marquis, he would not have allowed him to bring the woman to his highly respectable establishment. What would Madame say? This was what perplexed Dulau, who had a proper respect for the chief of the household.

To his delight, Madame took the affair kindly. She liked the look of Charles Cotton, a handsome young Englishman, with plenty of pluck; and she was fond of a romance. So she took the young woman, fresh from Thames, in hand, and tried to

get something out of her, but she might as well have tried to get blood out of a diamond or Roederer from a Good Templar. She continued sullen, though professing a great amount of gratitude to the man who had saved her life, but she would not say who she was or where she lived. Madame Dulau was naturally disgusted.

"I won't have that *misérable* here, Achille," she said. "Let her go. Why Monsieur Cotton did not allow her to drown I cannot understand. It would have been the best thing for her."

But Dulau induced his wife to let the poor creature stay, and it was fortunate that he did so. She was put into a room upstairs, and made comfortable. It was Cotton's wish, and Cotton's natural impetuosity was backed by the paramount influence of Castelcicala, so there was the tall yellow-haired suicidal failure sulking in an attic, when the Marquis de Castelcicala turned up at Dulau's in the evening. There was a pleasantly inaccurate account of the attempt at suicide, printed on pink paper, by an evening journal; but the Marquis had not seen this, as he hated pink paper. Indeed, he had a general detestation of newspapers, resting on the theory (wholly incorrect of course) that their news is often false, and that their opinions based on that news are always wrong. I confess that I am sorry for

Castelcicala, who could not appreciate the wisdom and experience which are found in the English newspaper editor. We go in for potted omniscience in this great country; if the inferior European States cannot perceive our success in this direction, we can only be sorry for them. Some people would say, pray for them; but I do not go so far as that.

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CHAPTER XI.

THE PEER'S CAPRICE.

ASTROLOGOS.—Ambition has, my lord, unknown developments,
 And when a man has squeezed the sponge of life enough
 To satisfy the multitude, he yearns once more
 For something utterly beyond the multitude,
 Something immeasurable, mad, impossible.

RAPHAEL.—With such a man, I have the strongest sympathy:

My sorrow is, to me there's nought impossible.

ALOUETTE (*aside*).—Make love to me, fair prince, and see what comes of it,
The Comedy of Dreams.

WHY in the world should Bellasys want fifty thousand pounds? Where in the world was Crake to get that sum in a day? Let us deal with the second question first. Look at the advertisements of the leading London papers, and you will see announced various co-operative schemes which are supposed to open a royal road to fortune. One society, if you deal with its associated tradesmen, kindly guarantees that all the money you spend on meat and drink and clothing shall in due time be returned to you; whence it is clear that there is no longer any truth in the old proverb, *Ex nihilo nihil fit*. Another

whose fluent lecturer seems to have made a slight impression on the Town of Steel, proposes a confederation of working men to surpass the superb financial achievements of the Barings and the Rothschilds. The idea has a grandeur almost oppressive. If a million working men were to subscribe a sovereign each, and put it in the hands of a financier who was honest, and could wisely manipulate a million sterling, it would in due time be decupled; but when this ideal financier had got his ten millions, might it not be too much for his honesty? There are a good many things a sovereign will buy: trowsers, shoes, dinners, wine, lie within the limit of that convenient yellow disc.

Now Crake, a wise man in his generation, had originated a co-operative scheme long before these fumblers tried to do something in that way. Crake was by profession a thief, and was proud thereof. He found out, with those ferret eyes of his, a few other gentlemen who were thieves, but who could not steal scientifically. They were dumb poets, so to speak. Crake took them in hand, and used them wisely. Their joint capital was so utilised as to produce much more than that ideal eighteen per cent. which is the offer made by modern co-operation.

Crake, in promising Lord Bellasys fifty thousand

pounds by two o'clock next day, had made a heavy pull on his resources. He had not above twenty thousand pounds in the Bank of England at the moment, and there were small amounts, a thousand or two, to come out of that. So he was in the City at an early hour the next morning, to meet his syndicate. The place of meeting was a dingy hole in Little Saint Thomas Apostle. Three of his comrades met him; he explained the business briefly, and they were quite ready.

"Bellasys is safe," said one man. "Can't think why he wants it, for I never knew him borrow money before."

"Perhaps he wants a new sensation," said another. "If so, I think borrowing money as likely to amuse him as anything."

The third, who was a very pious gentleman, and a great benefactor to the suburban church at which he worshipped, said nothing; but it was arranged that Crake should have the money at once, and he drove off with it, a tempting bundle of crisp notes, to Long's Hotel, reaching that well-known pleasant hostelry at a few minutes before twelve. He was not the sort of fellow that the hotel in question welcomes gleefully; and the waiter, when he asked for Lord Bellasys, looked at him with a slightly scrutinising eye. But Frederick, the waiter aforesaid, was

aware that Lord Bellasys was a man without need to fear attorneys, sheriffs' officers, and the whole vile crew who live upon the recklessness of gentlemen which they assiduously encourage. So Crake found his way, at a little past noon, to his lordship's sitting-room.

No one there, of course. Preparations for breakfast, in the form of a lobster, a perigord pie, sundry tall bottles of various wines. No Lord Bellasys. "Little he cares for fifty thou'," thought Crake. Presently the door opened, and in came the Honourable Clarence Vere, fresh as paint, with a gardenia in his buttonhole.

"Ha, Crake," said he, "here you are! Nothing like business. Don't forget the cheque for commission, you old villain."

"His lordship doesn't seem in a hurry for the money," said Crake.

"Bellasys in a hurry for anything! When you see that announce the day of judgment. You're a cool hand, Crake, but you're not so cool as Bellasys."

Presently Bellasys entered, looking fresh and bright, with a twinkle of fun in his eye. He liked a lark. There was no harm in this man, but he looked on the sunny side of life.

"Just in time for breakfast, old Crake," he said.

"Ring the bell, Clarry. They promised me something special this morning, because I came home early last night. Got in by two, by Jove! I think the most difficult thing in these days is getting to bed."

Breakfast was served in Jubber's finest style. Crake scarcely knew himself. Nothing was wanting that Billingsgate or Leadenhall or Covent Garden could supply. The wine, which comes straight from the grower, was perfect. The old thief and usurer and scamp of all work almost melted into humanity as he ate and drank. Bellasys, who was what few people imagined him—an observer of human nature,—was greatly amused by Crake.

The entertainment ended with caviare on toast, and a Sillery *sec* which would have made Thackeray happy. It was nearly two o'clock. Vere, who had been for some time wondering when business was to begin, said suddenly,

"Are you going down to Fulham this morning, Bellasys? It groweth late."

Bellasys looked at his watch.

"True, my friend. I must move. Have you got that small sum of money, Crake? Here's my cheque."

He took it from his waistcoat-pocket, and care-

lessly threw it to the usurer, who on his part at once handed over Bank of England notes to the amount of £50,000. Bellasys shoved them carelessly into the side pocket of his morning coat; then, rising, he said,

"Thanks, Crake. Good morning. You'll find the cheque all right." And he walked out of the room.

Now comes the other question, placed first, to be answered second. Why in the world should Lord Bellasys want to borrow £50,000 at 60 per cent.? Why could not this owner of vast estates take things easily, and use his property wisely? Well, as a fact, fifty thousand was rather more than he could call up on the instant, for he was lucky in having a sagacious steward, who did not starve the estates. A queer mixture of common sense and madness was Bellasys. He encouraged his steward in careful management, and never demanded from him an unusual money supply; but he indulged many wild whims, which he could easily do out of his vast income. However, he had just now thought on the wildest whim of all, and it was to gratify it he went to Crake for this £50,000. It was a trifle to a man with a third of a million a year.

Now to reveal the whim. Bellasys had seen Lady Elfrida Fontenoy, daughter of a Duke and full

of unsatisfied ambitions, and had taken a slight fancy to her, which she had returned fifty-fold. In fact he found that it was almost necessary for him to run away with her: and, although he was a good deal puzzled what he should do with her thereafter, in his wild mood he thought he would risk it. He had a great contempt for her father, the Duke of Derwentwater, the richest and prosiest of the ducal hierarchy. So he let Lady Elfrida have her wilful way, met her and her maid, very much muffled up, at Waterloo Station, and took them off to Southampton, where his yacht was waiting for him.

It was a dull enough journey. Lady Elfrida was already in a repentant state. Bellasys, who would have been gay enough if really interested in the lady with whom he was eloping, was longing all the way for a cigar. Never had the line from London to Southampton seemed so desperately dreary. The maid was luckiest of the two: she slept.

La femme propose. When the great seaport was reached at last, the first person Bellasys saw on the platform was Lord Robert Fontenoy, Elfrida's brother. That young gentleman was noted for coolness. He came up to Bellasys in a quiet way and said,

"Ah, old fellow, glad to see you have taken care of Elfrida. I will relieve you of your charge. She

is going to Fontenoy with me. Glad to see you there, at any time."

Bellasys was relieved. He took his hat off to the lady, and drove to Radley's Hotel, heartily thankful for the invention of the telegraph.

He had a great contempt for her father, the Duke of Derwentwater, the richest and proudest of the duchy. So he let Lady Ellida have her will, way, met her and her maid, very much muffled up, at Waterloo Station, and took them off to Southampton, where his yacht was waiting for him.

It was a dull enough journey. Lady Ellida was already in a repentant state. Bellasys, who would have been gay enough if really interested in the lady with whom he was cloping, was longing all the way for a cigar. Never had the time from London to Southampton seemed so desperately dreary. The maid was luckiest of the two: she slept.

A few more hours. When the great seaport was reached at last, the first person Bellasys saw on the platform was Lord Robert Fontenoy, Ellida's brother. That young gentleman was noted for chivalry. He came up to Bellasys in a quiet way and said,

"Ah, old fellow, glad to see you have taken care of Ellida. I will relieve you of your charge. She

CHAPTER XII.

DAPHNE AND APOLLO.

APOLLO.—I Claros-isle and Tenedos command.

DAPHNE.—Thank ye, I would not leave my native land.

PRIOR.

WHEN the marquis reached Dulau's and heard what had occurred, he was much amused.

"Who is the woman?" he asked.

"No one knows," said Dulau, "and she will not tell."

"So you saved her life without knowing anything about her," said Castalcicala. "Was the game worth the candle? And why bring her here? Surely you might have let her find her way home."

"It is my fault," said Cotton. "I had a superstitious feeling that I had saved her life for some purpose. It was stupid, I fear."

"Of course it was," laughed the Marquis. "All human actions are stupid. Yet, somehow, our very stupidity is sometimes better than wisdom. Success is often due to wholesale blundering. Waterloo was

won by mistake, according to the best military authorities. Let us leave this young person till morning, when possibly I may get something out of her. How do you like London, Cotton?"

"I already feel at home in it," he said. "It seems to me a city in which any man, able and willing to work, may live and may enjoy life. I am eager to see more of it."

"So you shall. We will see a little of London together this evening. Let us go and dine."

Cotton's notion of dinner was mid-diurnal, but he knew that patricians dined when plebeians supped, and he accepted the Marquis's offer with laudable coolness. Sending for a hansom, Castelcicala took the young villager farther west. It amused him to see the villager turn Londoner so quickly. "That's the strong point with these English," he thought; "nothing astonishes them. If you took an English minnow out of a brook, and threw him into the Atlantic, he'd become a whale, or at least a sword-fish."

Lycett's. Do you know it, courteous reader? The Marquis and Cotton passed through a long corridor, with cool lavatories, and entered a lofty room with wide windows looking on a patrician thoroughfare. Tall mirrors, paintings on the panel of game and fruit, vaulted ceiling with the Rape of

Proserpine by Thornhill or one of his disciples, stern old Pluto flogging four horses abreast with one hand, while the other encircled the lady's nude waist, made a curious impression on the young man's mind. The waiters were all dressed in a green livery, with knee breeches and buckled shoes—and powdered hair.

"Tell Lycett I wish to see him," said the Marquis to one of these tall fellows, taking his seat where a table was invitingly niched in a bow window. "Sit down, Cotton. You get here the best dinner in the world."

"I have found a steak and a pint of beer the best dinner in the world before now," said the glazier.

"Appetite makes dinner, as imagination makes poetry. Ah, here comes Lycett."

There appeared a short lively gentleman of seventy, with white hair, in irreproachable evening dress, with diamond studs in his snowy linen shirt. He bowed to the Marquis with marvellous elegance.

"I have not seen you for a long while," said Castalcicala. "Now I want a nice little dinner for my friend, who has brought a grand unsophisticated appetite to London. What shall we give him?"

Lycett put up his gold-rimmed glasses, and eyed

Cotton curiously. A young fellow with an appetite! His business was to create appetite by excellence of viand. He thought a rumpsteak was the best thing for a fellow like Cotton. Still the Marquis must have his way. So the oracle spoke.

"Half-a-dozen oysters, and Montrachet; clear turtle and punch; red mullet stewed in port; Champagne; fillet of beef; Chambertin; grouse, with Yquem; gruyère; nectarines and figs; Chartreuse and Noyau."

Lycett rattled off his whimsical bill of fare in the rapid style of Charles Mathews and Albert Smith—the Marquis accepted it with amusement, and in less than a quarter of an hour the oysters were there, and the other courses followed with perfect regularity. Charles Cotton took the whole matter coolly, though never before in his life had he tasted mullet or turtle or grouse, Montrachet or Chartreuse. He held the theory that what a man eats and drinks, is less important than what a man does and thinks. His perfectly simple comments on the whole entertainment greatly amused the Marquis. He smiled to see that he preferred Noyau to Chartreuse, and nectarines to figs. Really the palate demands as much education as the brain.

"Shall we go to a theatre?" said the Marquis

presently. "We shall be in time for the ballet at the Caprice, where I have a box."

"I have never been at a theatre, except at a country fair," said Cotton. "But I have read Shakespeare."

"His caprices, superb as they were, will not prepare you for the Caprice. Come and see for yourself."

They drove to this pleasant little theatre. The Marquis had a stage box on a lower level than the stage itself. The ballet was mythological—turning on that story well known to all readers of Lempriere's Dictionary and Mangnall's Questions, the pursuit of Daphne by Apollo. Apollo was played by a superb female of about five feet ten, whereas Daphne was a little creature not above five feet, and as lively as a bird; and these were the principal actors all through. Burlesque words were wedded to charming music; and Apollo wooed Daphne and Daphne defied Apollo in dances which rather astonished Charles Cotton's weak mind.

"As a study of legs," said the Marquis, using his opera glass, "I consider this scene perfect."

Apollo was dashing after Daphne. She, pirouetting around the stage, with attitudes that might make a virtuous Lord Chamberlain blush, laughed at his

attempts. Suddenly he came to the front of the stage, and she, lightly leaping on his shoulder, sang—

“Poor dear Apollo!

Couldn't he follow?

Does he get older, the god of the sun?

Nymphs were afraid of him:

Now they have made of him

Just a mere joke, for his courage is done.

“Poor dear Apollo!

The girls beat him hollow,

Soon he will sadly be tearing his hair:

Where are his laurels

And manners and morals?

Echo replies that she doesn't know where.”

Daphne sang. Apollo caught her by the ankle. She, freeing herself from his grip, turned rather an indecorous somersault, designed to display her form. Display of form, when natural, is the true thing; when theatrical, and done with a purpose, it is nasty. This feeling fell upon Charles Cotton, a sensible young fellow, with the idea in his head that a woman is too beautiful to be in the least degree sullied by immodesty. He had fallen in love with an ideal girl, a creature who might some day stand

“... like some Greek Lady of the Skies,

In marble carved for millions to admire,”

and for him only to love and to have. And, having thus fallen in love, he could not endure the thought

of any woman lowering herself to the mere exhibition of her form for money. Apollo and Daphne gave him a sick feeling. His face showed his disgust, for the Marquis said,

"You don't like this?"

"No, indeed."

"Nor I. When, in the old Greek processions, boys and girls walked naked, there was no harm, because there was no design of harm. But this sort of thing is abominable, and I shall give up my box at the Caprice."

"I know nothing of theatres," said Charles Cotton, as they walked homewards, being unable to get a cab, "but I cannot help thinking they do more harm than good, if what I have seen to-night is a fair specimen."

"Fair!" quoth the Marquis, "I can show you stranger things. But I will wait till you have learnt a little more of this wild stern London."

"Do people really enjoy the kind of dancing I have just seen?" asked Cotton.

"It goes on night after night, for hundreds of nights together."

"How strange! I should have thought it would have disgusted everybody. I never want to see anything of the sort again."

"Once is enough," said Castalcicala to himself. "That boy's ideas are pure. I like him. I hope England has plenty of the same stamp."

They went home together, and the Marquis had his customary room, always kept for him by Dulau. Next morning he obtained permission to visit the lady whom Cotton had saved from what is commonly known as a watery grave. She was still in a sulky state, and possibly might have made another plunge from the bridge had she been anywhere near it. She was red-eyed, hectic, excited.

"Just tell me," said the Marquis, with commanding coolness, "why you threw yourself into the river."

The girl shrank back into a corner of the room, holding her long yellow hair with both hands; but his strong keen glance followed and fixed her.

"Tell me," he said again, in accents of unmistakeable resolve.

"I wanted to get away from horrid slavery," she said, sobbing terribly. "I am so tired of that dreadful man! I married him down at Kent, ten years ago, when I was just come into a little money, and I was a fool, and he was handsome and boastful. O good God! how could I know he was a coward and a thief? And now I am tied to him all my

life. O, I wish that young man had left me alone and let me drown!"

"Don't be foolish," said the Marquis, with a caressing kindness which he always used to women in distress. "You have had terrible misfortunes, but you should not try to escape from them in a wicked way. For a good woman to be married to a bad man is dreadful, but she ought still to try to be good. Is this man doing anything very wicked just now?"

"O, I don't know, sir," she sobbed. "I think I heard him say to a pal he was going after diamonds. They call him the Parson. O dear, dear, dear me! how well I remember when I saw him first, on Tunbridge Cricket Ground! I thought what a handsome man he was. And to think what has come of it, and all my poor little bit of money gone!"

Castelcicala was sadly impressed by this poor woman, who was evidently fit for a better career. He saw, however, that, by her accidental appearance on the scene, there was a better chance of regaining the Squire's diamonds. The moment she told him her story he sprang to the conclusion; and he decided that by means of this woman, accidentally rescued by Cotton, the diamonds might be traced. A difficult and delicate task, seeing that a woman who knows her husband to be a thief, and feels him to

be a brute, will try to save him from harm. What can be said? Women are women. There is nobody who can understand them, and nobody who can help loving them.

"O, I don't know, sir," she sobbed. "I think I heard him say to a pal he was going after diamonds. They call him the Baron. O dear, dear, dear me! how well I remember when I saw him first, on Turbridge Cricket Ground! I thought what a handsome man he was. And to think what has come of it, and all my poor little bit of money gone!"

Castiglione was sadly impressed by this poor woman, who was evidently fit for a better career. He saw, however, that by her accidental appearance on the scene, there was a better chance of regaining the Spire's diamonds. The moment she told him her story he sprang to the conclusion; and he decided that by means of this woman, accidentally rescued by Cotton, the diamonds might be traced. A difficult and delicate task, seeing that a woman who knows her husband to be a thief, and feels him to

CHAPTER XIII.

FALCONRY.

"The hawk soars high. A flutter in the heronry."

YES. When the falcon soars, the heron flutters. The Marquis returned from London to Englehurst, with a thin thread of discovery running through his brain, which he had left in the hands of the detectives. He had also left Charles Cotton at M. Dulau's establishment, with perfect instructions as to what he had better do. The Marquis had his reasons for a rapid return. The diamonds would be rescued, he felt pretty sure; but he was thinking of a pearl of girls—Cis Englehurst.

Castelcicala was a philosopher as well as a poet, and he thought over this question very carefully. He was Italian; she English; he was a dozen or fifteen years her elder. Was it possible she could care for him? Castelcicala was not agonizingly in love; if a woman refused him he would simply think she was rather a fool for doing so. And he

would have some justification, since he was a man who would worship the lady he loved in poetic fashion. He was true knight and troubadour. To him a lady was a divinity. Such men are rather rare in these days of the Divorce Court and the breach of promise action; but they still exist. To put it tersely, there are a few gentlemen who believe in the existence of ladies. That such should be the case is a remarkable fact. The loud woman, the fast woman, the scientific woman, have done their utmost to abolish the lady. Ah, but without success. She lives still, in happy corners of England where progress is unknown, and where she grows, a joyous radiant flower, unspoiled by algebraic or ecclesiastic watering-pot. There are plenty of lovely girls in England who know absolutely nothing—those are the sweet creatures from whom to choose wives. The instant they begin to talk about the Athanasian Creed or the Darwinian theory they are useless for marriageable purposes.

Castelcicala came back, told the Squire things were in train, and the diamonds would probably be restored, and then tempted Cecilia to try her falcons. He wanted to fill her gay young head with joyous romance, all connected with him. On the river Engle there was a grand heronry, and the glorious birds were to be seen fishing the stream at

all hours of the day; but chiefly at eventide, when the sunset fell upon the shallows, the herons if startled flew away into the sunset as if they were a part of it. Many a time had Cis Englehurst watched them in her somewhat solitary girlhood, rising suddenly into the purple sky with magic mockery of its divine colours. It had been a delight to her to sit on the banks of the Engle, with her favourite poet to dream over, and to see the calm tall birds fishing the pools, and then to watch them soaring away into the glory of the west.

Now who was Cis Englehurst's favourite poet? Should you care much, O investigative reader, for a girl whose ideal was Rossetti or Swinburne or Tennyson? I shouldn't. If you meet with a girl who understands her Shakespeare, you find a lady of Rosalind's delicious type. Whereas, when you encounter an adorer of Tupper . . . no, I can't finish that sentence. Our pretty Cis did not roam in the wide regions which Shakespeare has filled with life and love, with grandeur and glory; but she did not read Tupper. No: Cis's pet poet was Keats: and how many delicious dreams she dreamt over *The Eve of St. Agnes*, over those divine odes inspired by a nightingale and a Greek urn, and quite without parallel in our literature! There are much greater things, but these are unique—the work of

an unclassical Englishman who was Greek by intuition. Sophocles, the nightingale of Colonos, would have envied them.

So Cis read Keats by the Engle, and watched the herons. And her study of that poet led her to in some measure understand Castalcicala's romantic character. For the Marquis looked on life with that calm delight which is noticeable in the later poems of Keats; he loved the beauty of the world and the beauty of women; he enjoyed existence with a kind of industrious indolence. The fierce passion felt or affected by certain modern writers was wholly out of his line: he was cavalier and troubadour, and could love a lady and defend her against the world, but he could not writhe and sweat and . . . make a brute of himself. His brain was as clear as his rapier, and his laugh as true as his oath. He looked on life as to be lived wisely, and thereby happily. He looked on Cis Englehurst as the most lovely creature with unawakened heart that he had seen, and he felt a joyous ambition to win her. But, if he failed, if another man won, why he would wish them both the highest happiness, and would do all he could to secure it. Such was the Castalcicala's temper. He had no idea of an only possible she. Perhaps he was rather too great an admirer of all lovely ladies to throw his

whole soul into an absolute insatiable passion for one.

However, he worshipped Cis Englehurst, who dreamt the hours away without thought of love. She wandered in Keats's calm forest-ground, where there is no revelation of human passion, but only a mingling of mystery and myth. She was very happy; a spoilt child with the kindest of fathers; no trouble in the past save her mother's loss; no fear in the future; nothing but a happy present to enjoy in all its heights and depths. O, to drink the divine wine of life from so clear a chalice! But, as the Epicurean poet says,

" . . . medio de fonte leporum
Surgit amari aliquid."

Pretty soft-eyed dreamy Cis, that "amari aliquid" will somehow reach you. Man, which includes girl, is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upwards.

The first day of hawking was very pleasant. There was the Squire on his dark brown weight-carrier, a horse that seemed built for his master. Cis was on a gentle chestnut mare, and, with a tercel gentle on her gloved wrist, looked altogether ready for sport. Castalcicala rode a rather fidgety bay that he had taken in hand because the grooms were afraid of it, and were spoiling it. Rough usage

made it savage; it merely wanted a light hand and a good temper. The Marquis had hooded goshawk on wrist, and some of the people went down to Engle brink to scare a heron.

Up one soars, a purple and grey wonder in the sky. Castalcicala's falcon is unhooded, sees the soaring bird, flies like a shaft of lightning upward. The excitement is intense. Cis, though she loves the daring hawk, cannot help wishing the heron to escape; and there are tears in her bright eyes as the falcon, with pride of power, gets far above the heron, and prepares to swoop on its quarry. The hapless bird turns on its back in the air, and tries to defend itself with the claws that have put to death many an unlucky fish. Vain! The hawk falls on it like a thunderbolt; his fatal talons are in its brain; they descend together, a fluttering heap of feathers.

"O, how dreadful!" cried Cis.

Meanwhile the falconer had picked up the heron, and given the goshawk a lump of raw meat as a reward for his achievement.

There was more hawking that afternoon, and in time Cis Englehurst began to enjoy it. She pitied the beautiful herons at first, but the swift splendour and wild wonder of the hawks converted her to cruelty. I forget who remarked that women are by

nature cruel, but there is just a little bit of truth in it. At the same time, I think that the woman who has gratified her taste for cruelty is always very sorry for it just after.

Cis Englehurst enjoyed her first gay afternoon of falconry, but it was not destined to end without an adventure. At a point above the Engle, where the wooded bank sloped about a hundred feet sheer down, Castalcicala was waiting for another heron to rise. He held his fidgety horse rather carelessly, and it suddenly started. A miserable boy with a penny whistle came across the heath; the Marquis's horse had never heard any noise so atrocious before, and did its utmost to get out of the way of it. Down the precipitous woodland rushed the horse; Castalcicala, taken by surprise, could only hold on by the thighs, and give him his head. He came down on his knees at the bottom of the descent, and his rider fell over his head, insensible.

Cis was there in two minutes. Her father rode round, but she, with quiet resolve, made her mare walk down the steep incline. By the time the Squire and his servants got round, Castalcicala was reviving. It was rather a pretty scene. There he lay, his curly head in her lap, while she bathed his brow with water from the Engle, and applied smelling-salts to his nostrils.

"This is what he wants, Cis," said the Squire, when he rode up. And he made the sufferer drink something from a flask, but what it was I venture not to say. It aroused the Marquis.

"I'm afraid that horse is done for, Englehurst," he said, raising himself rather reluctantly from his pleasant pillow. "It was my fault. He is easy enough when one has him well in hand. But I had got careless."

"And that brute of a boy came with his whistle," said the Squire. "I've told one of my fellows to thrash him well. Never mind the horse, my dear friend. Are you hurt much?"

"Any hurt would have been cured by the gentle relief I so soon received," said the Marquis. "It is quite worth while to be thrown from a horse to be so kindly treated afterwards."

"Cis went straight down after you, Marquis," said the Squire. "I galloped round."

Castelcicala looked up at the sharp descent. It seemed a hard matter for himself, a man who had risked his neck in a myriad ways. For Cecilia it was terrible. He was greatly moved. He wondered whether she loved him. But he only said, taking both her hands in his:—

"How brave and good you are!"

It is no new thing to say that you are apt to

love those to whom you have done good. Nor, indeed, is it new that those who receive good too often hate the giver. I suppose this strange sad frailty of humanity is at the bottom of curious superstitions that work in uneducated minds; as, for instance, that if you save a person from drowning he will at some future time do you harm. It was my hap, in schoolboy days at Southsea, twice to save the same youngster from death; once, sleep-walking, he was on the point of throwing himself out of a window; the other time, trying to swim by the aid of bladders, he got his head under water and his feet in the air. In each case I chanced to be close enough to rescue him; and, as he never played me any rascally trick, as indeed I have never since heard of him, I think the old superstition may be disregarded.

Castelcicala had received a sharp shock. He looked somewhat pale and weak at dinner that day. Moreover, he was slightly angry with himself for having, after bringing the horse into order, forgotten for a moment the need of keeping its restless spirit under continuous control. It provoked this *preux chevalier* to have made even a momentary mistake. His was the haughty fiery spirit we find in the early ballads of Victor Hugo, written while he was still a poet:

"Mon page, emplis mon escarcelle;

Velle

Mon cheval de Calatrava:

Va!"

In these days of £ s. d. there are yet a few men who decline to worship the £ s.-deity; and if, while so declining, they may perchance show a disproportionate delight in horse, hawk, hound, in woman, wine, wit, their critics have better reason to envy than to defame them.

CHAPTER XIV.

HUMAN FLOWERS.

Ore floridulo nitens,

Alba parthenice velut,

Luteumve papaver.

CATULLUS.

LOVELY Cis Englehurst pitied the Marquis very much indeed. The weary look of a man who has suffered a severe shock gave paleness to his cheek; but his eyes were as bright as ever, perchance a trifle brighter, since they were lighted by the thought of her courageous kindness in forcing her way straight to where he lay insensible. He wondered whether she loved him a little. Perhaps after all the gallant girl would have done the same for any man. Well, one thing was certain; not one woman in five thousand would have ridden down that perilous slope to help a man in trouble.

That evening Castalcicala went early to his rooms, much needing rest. Just before he went Cecilia had sung a quaint little canzonet, made and

married to music by some ancient writer, and entitled.

THE TWO LOVES.

Two loves there are. I once knew one
Who came beneath the golden skies
With marvellous eyes.

Catching the splendour of the sun,
His finger touched me on the breast,
And left no rest.

Like, ah but unlike! He who came
Next with a song too gay and light,
A merry wight,
Had not the finger tipped with flame.
The day with him was mirthful mad;
The night too sad.

Come back again, young Love that first,
When blush on dainty lady-smocks
The maiden mocks,
So sudden sweet upon me burst!
Bring, to appease my wild desire,
That finger's fire.

The Marquis carried away with him the delicate music of the old madrigal-maker, full of minor touches and sudden changes. He dreamt thereof the long night through, wearied as he was by his adventure of the afternoon. Few men or women with imagination have not traced the echo of the day's doings in the vague visions of the night; new forms they take through the kaleidoscope of Dream-land, but those forms seem familiar. And dreams have not power over us when the vital force is not

at its highest; then they come, often in a refreshing, but often also in a torturing form. The Marquis dreamt pleasantly; to him the melody of the canzonet repeated itself in countless ways; while Cis Englehurst was faintly visible to him in the many magical shapes which Mercutio ascribed to Queen Mab, and a thousand more, which even the facile fancy of Mercutio could not paint.

“For unto every lover his own lady is
All ladies and all beauties and all mysteries,
The breathing multiple of roses passionate,
Of perfect pearls, of birds with happy melody;
Ay, a mere girl, yet in herself a universe.”

As to Cecilia, for hours she slept not. She was questioning her heart, which just began to awaken. She opened her favourite poet, and read for the thousandth time two lines which all at once seemed to have a meaning which she had never guessed:—

“But to her heart her heart was voluble,
Paining with eloquence her balmy side.”

The magic scene which the young poet depicted with felicity of phrase almost Shakespearian, seemed to arise before her. On her breast also, as on Madeline's, Love, or the phantom of Love (which was it?) “threw warm gales,” and when

“Her rich attire creeps rustling to her knees,”

she wishes it were the eve of Saint Agnes, and that she might see her real lover, even as Madeline be-

held Porphyro. Have such things ever been? Or is it only the fond poet's dream?

What chance, I wonder, had the hapless Charles Cotton, away in London, in Dulau's Soho lodging? The young glazier dreamt of Englehurst night after night; dreamt of the young beauty he had beheld when he put in that unforgettable pane of glass; did not, however, dream that a new mist of romance surrounded her. Poor fellow! How could he expect to fight with such fortune as that of the handsome adventurous affluent Marquis? Pshaw! Better, O Charles Cotton, forget your daring family motto, forget lovely Cis Englehurst, and settle down patiently to regular plumber and glazier's work, and a stout country girl for a wife.

Vain would it have been to give Charles Cotton this clearly prudent advice. Amid the unaccustomed distractions of London, and with a mystery which for his own sake he was fain to solve, the darling dream was in his heart. The charm of Cecilia Englehurst was written on the retina of his brain, as the picture of the home of his youth, with its white jessamine and sweet honeysuckle, is inscribed on the mind of the returning voyager who has spent long years in strange countries and among wild people. Verily, without imagination, man is man no longer. That supposititious wanderer may not

find the old cottage of his childhood overhung with creepers; may not meet the recognising eyes of a single friend of his youth. But he has the delicious vision. And so Cotton, whether ever again he might come nigh the lady of his fantasy, was able to dwell in ceaseless thought upon eyes like living gems under casket-lids of rose-flushed ivory, on her mouth like a bud which love would turn to a flower, upon the lissom beauty of her movement, the dainty grace that was her own alone.

Morning came, a joyous autumnal dawn; not very joyous indeed to poor Charles Cotton in Soho, but he was true to his motto, "In utraque fortuna paratus," and he bore his dull life well enough. Dull it was, though Dulau in his own way tried to find amusement for a guest whom he highly honoured, as being commended to him by the Marquis. On this particular day Cotton arose early, felt the stuffy air of Soho too much for him, and wandered away westward. A market-gardener's empty two-horse waggon came trotting along from Covent Garden; the driver, a jolly-looking fellow, who had just breakfasted on beef and beer, after delivering his master's wares to his salesman, shouted to Cotton, asking him whether he would like a lift. It was in Kensington High Street, and Cotton was pining for country air, so he sprang up on the seat of the

waggon. The carman was a pleasant fellow, who liked his glass of stout, and knew where the barmaids were prettiest. What wonder if the horses were stopped in the Broadway at Hammersmith, at the Pigeons at Brentford, at the Rose and Crown at Hounslow, at the Magpies four miles farther on?

The nursery gardens were close to Bedfont, the legend of whose two peacocks Tom Hood has given us in octave rhyme, in his least felicitous style; and, notwithstanding the frequent stoppages in honour of Barclay and Perkins, saints at whose shrine Cotton never before had so freely worshipped, the fast trotting horses reached here at about seven o'clock. Just as they were pulling up, the scream of a traction engine frightened them; the driver, who was in a careless mood, was taken by surprise; they bolted and upset the light waggon into a ditch, and Cotton was thrown right over the low hedge into the nursery grounds. He had no bones broken, by good hap, but was sorely shaken. The driver alighted on his skull, which, being the toughest portion of his person, saved him from utter destruction.

Cotton found himself in the very midst of an asparagus bed, which he had seriously damaged. The driver was not hurt a bit, having taken sufficient stout to deprive him of the resisting power

which makes an accident dangerous. Harm seldom happens to a drunken man.

When Cotton recovered from his shock, and began to realise his position, a quaint-looking girl of about sixteen was looking at him, with commiserating eyes.

"Are you hurt much?" she said. "I was obliged to laugh when I saw you thrown over Papa's hedge; but I cried after, because I thought you must be killed."

"I don't think I'm hurt at all," said Cotton, stretching himself to ascertain whether his physical machinery was in good order. "Have I committed a dreadful trespass?"

"O no," she said. "You must come in and see Papa. He encourages trespassers, because he says they buy his flowers and fruit. Come along."

Cotton followed this gay short-frocked maiden, much amused. Presently two others, younger sisters, came dancing down to meet them. They were all three alike, with short curly brown hair, and noses of the *retroussé* style, and mouths a trifle too large, and ankles a trifle too thick.

"There are my sisters," said the elder maiden. "I am Hyacinth, and this is Ixia, and the little chit is Anemone. Papa names us all with flowers' names."

"A very pretty way of christening," said Cotton.

They went up a long gravel walk with espaliers on each side, and reached the house, a thatched cottage, smothered in Virginia creeper, wistaria, honeysuckle, and many another clematis. In its low rustic porch sat a stalwart man of fifty, with a book in his hand, and a strangely uncertain look in his wide open eyes. He rose as his daughter came with Cotton to the door: and from within a lady came forward, imperially tall, who seemed as if she were mistress of all around her.

"Mamma!" whispered Hyacinth, and by immediate intuition Cotton knew that this meant "step-mamma!" No *injuncta noverca* this; but

"You are welcome, sir," she said, in a voice so musical that its sound was like a song. "My husband is glad to welcome you or any other stranger, although he cannot see you."

"No," said the master of the house, "a flash of lightning cost me my eyesight. But speak, and I shall know what you are like. Is not that so, Perdita?"

CHAPTER XV.

THE MARKET GARDEN.

RAPHAEL.—I am adventurous, who would fain be indolent.

ASTROLOGOS.—Venus and Mars conjunct at your nativity
Gave love of luxury, with power of princeliness;
With you, my lord, 'tis always fight or festival.

The Comedy of Dreams.

CHARLES COTTON began to think he was fated to meet with adventures. His first ride in a Covent Garden waggon had landed him in an asparagus bed, and he felt in quite a dream as he saw the blind gardener, his stately wife, the three little flower-christened girls. His idea of London had never been poetic, or even romantic; he thought of it as a place where unpleasant people did unpleasant work for money. He would have liked to put panes of glass into manorial windows all his life, especially if through those "magic casements" he could see perpetual visions of Cis Englehurst. He was embarrassed and puzzled by the mighty fullness of London, its vast variety, its grandeur and

horror. New types of character came under his eyes so frequently that he began to realise the thought that, when God made the race of man, He made a race of infinite possibility. Charles Cotton had studied no science, but he had a clear brain and a poetic instinct; and what he saw of London stimulated him to a higher view of humanity than that which village life could ever give. It may be said that Bedfont is not London, and that is topographically true, but not psychologically. London's suburbs stretch far into England. Is not Brighton what Thackeray called it—London-super-Mare? A meagre borrower has called it Piccadilly-super-Mare—as if the four miles of shops, hotels, clubs, mansions, lodging-houses, which stretch along the Brighton shore, could be compared with the classic street in which Palmerston has lounged, of which Locker has sung.

When a man is told to speak, so that you may judge of his character, he is decidedly under a disadvantage, especially if he is an unsophisticated villager, like Cotton. But the lady who had been called Perdita, and who looked at the young man with an air of grave amusement which almost awed him, said, in her strangely musical voice,

“In this garden we are beyond the roar of the

world, so what you say will not be deadened by that external tumult."

"I have nothing to say," he replied, "except that I hardly know how I came here, and that I am glad to be here."

"He is six feet high," said the blind gardener, as to himself, "with curly brown hair, blue eyes, and a confoundedly long nose. He will either turn out a devilish good fellow, or go straight down hill to the devil."

Hyacinth and Ixia and Anemone, accustomed to their father's oracular sayings, laughed pleasantly, but were silenced by their stately step-mother's uplifted finger, and stood like pretty little statues. Her least look magnetised them. The gardener went on:

"Come, let us be festive. I have got a listener, I can perceive, so let us entertain him well. Find a melon, Hyacinth; and, Ixia, look for figs; and, Anemone, see if there are nectarines left. Perdita, some sparkling wine. Our guest was not brought roughly into our garden without some sufficient reason: meet it is that we entertain him."

Everyone obeyed orders, and in five minutes a dainty service of fruit and wine, as delicate as that which Eve set before the "affable archangel," stood glistening in the porch, the three flower-maidens

standing ready to wait. The melon was no larger than a cricket-ball, and dark green as to rind, and its fresh cut pink, fine, and juicy; the figs were purple and moist, untouched by hornet or wasp; the nectarines, delicately sunburnt, had a flavour incomparable. The wine sparkled in fanciful goblets. Neither Perdita nor the children partook of this poetic refection.

Cotton, amused and puzzled, enjoyed it. Presently the gardener said, "Children, go." Whereat the girls ran away at once; and then added, "Perdita, I want to talk to our friend. Lead me to the balcony."

She obeyed in a splendid fashion, as if she were a royal slave, a Cleopatra obeying a blind Cæsar. Taking his arm she led him up a wide stairway for so small a cottage, and he was seated in an old oak chair. Cotton also found a seat in the balcony, from which there was a lovely view of the fragrant and fertile garden.

"You can leave us, Perdita," he said, and she went without a word. Yet as she swept by Cotton seemed to perceive a touch of defiance in her stately movement.

"Listen, young man," said the gardener. "I heard your voice and liked it, and I want to say my say to somebody. You can see women obey me,

and I generally make men do it. I've had a queer life. When I was a young fool I got entangled with my mother's lady's-maid—it's a deuced easy entanglement, young fellow, I can tell you. Don't you try it."

"I haven't got a mother," said Cotton, "and if I had she wouldn't have a lady's-maid."

"They're a queer race," said the gardener, reflectively. "I ought to have known better than to have been taken in, for I was past thirty, and she was a dumpy little animal with a vile temper. However, I married her, and my father—he was a stockbroker, and wanted to found a family—left all his money to a lot of hospitals. I didn't care. I had a few thousands, and I turned gardener. My wife was a bore, illiterate and ill-tempered, so I just treated her like a slave. She gave me three daughters, and I gave them flower-names, but they are not much like flowers; they've inherited their mother's ugliness and dulness, but not her ill temper, I'm glad to say. That's partly because I gave them over to the crossdest German governess I could get, with special orders for severe castigation on the least occasion. But I suppose they in some degree inherit my own serenity of temper."

Charles Cotton was of course delighted with that supposition.

"Well, they are the three little jades, and I don't know what I shall do with them. They'd make capital gardeners' wives. You're not a gardener, I can see, else you might have one—or all three for that matter. Those girls do good work. I turn them out at five in summer, and six in winter, and I'll back them against any three men in my employ for all but rough business."

"They must get very tired," said Cotton.

"Of course they do, and a good thing for them. They come in at six, have supper at seven, and are in bed at eight, with all lights out. They're happy enough. Don't they seem so to you?"

Cotton admitted that they did.

"Yes, you are right," said the gardener. "Inferior animals need hard work, and my poor wife was a very inferior animal, and the girls follow her. It can't be helped."

He paused awhile. Cotton was satisfied to look across the pleasant garden to where Hyacinth and Ixia were up lofty ladders, picking ribstone pippins, looking in the distance more like wood-nymphs. Anemone was invisible, busy in the mushroom house.

"I feel garrulous to-day," said the gardener; "garrulous as Nestor. I daresay you will forget my story. You saw Perdita?"

"The lady who is your wife?" said Cotton.

"She is not my wife, though I allow the girls to think so—nor is she my mistress, though she is with me day and night. She is my faithful friend. You will deem it strange that I have never seen her face, and that I do not know her name."

"It is strange," said Cotton.

"You shall hear. Just after little Anemone was born, at which time her mother died, I was down at my front gate about midnight, in the midst of a tremendous thunderstorm. I love the grand roll of thunder; and when I could see the clouds exchanging sheets of flame, or the fierce forked zigzags falling in triple lines from sky to earth, I seemed to become an elemental soul. That night I saw the last of lightning. A carriage and four, the horses frightened by the storm, was dashed against my gate-posts. I ran out, in time to take a lady in a fainting state from the coach, but the lightning at the very moment blinded me, as she lay in my arms. How it did not kill me I cannot guess. I know nothing of what followed, except that I carried her from the gate to the house, where everybody was in bed, and groped my way upstairs with her. I was dizzy with the frightful shock. Only the strong impulse of having a life to save could have brought me so far. I put her on the bed, and then I sank

beside her, absolutely unable to do more. And the next thing I remember is the feeling of her soft hand upon my brow, hours afterwards, bathing it with some fragrant water."

"A marvellous incident," said Cotton.

"I have related it to no one but you," said the gardener, "and I desire no one else to know it. I felt compelled to speak, like the Ancient Mariner of Coleridge. Perdita has been with me ever since, and has shown infinite gratitude and faithfulness. I have never asked her a question. I have elsewhere learnt that she was at that moment, when Jupiter Tonans and I interfered, running away from her husband with some other man, and that her husband is a person of some importance, and wonders very much what can have become of her. Do you consider her handsome?"

"Superbly so," said Cotton.

"Ah, and I shall never see her. So much the better, perhaps. She is a good creature, in her limited way."

"You have no strong affection for her, then?" said Cotton. "Her beauty would intoxicate many men."

"That fountain of intoxication is closed for me; and I could never love a woman who for one instant had cared for another man."

"Yet you accept her kindly service, and allow your daughters to think her your wife. I am only a boy, and have not read much on such subjects, but I should think two persons living together in that way could scarcely be happy."

"Did I say I was happy, young man? Did I say she was happy? Think out both cases. Can you imagine me happy, with a certainty that never more shall my old eyes behold sky or sea or land?"

"Homer and Milton were blind," said Cotton.

"I am not a poet. The physical eye is outdone by the imagination. Homer saw the gods on Olympus, and Milton saw Adam with Eve in Eden, while the defeated Archangel watched to betray them. I have no such visions to console me, and long to see even so commonplace a thing as a bed of lettuces. And I admit that I would give anything to see Perdita."

He paused a few moments, while Cotton sat silent, and then went on again.

"That she should be happy is, of course, absurd. She did a great misdeed, which, but for an accident, might have been greater. The sudden shock of that thunderstorm brought her in some measure to her right mind. I believe the man from whom she fled was a villain, and of course the man with whom she was flying was a thorough villain. I think over

the matter perpetually, and construct all sorts of theories about her, and I have come to this conclusion. She is a lady whom the brutality of a bad husband drove into the arms of a worse lover. Rescued from both by an unparalleled incident, she determines to keep aloof from both, and makes a vow to do all that she can for me, her chance rescuer. That is my idea, and with that idea I accept her services, treating her as my equal, but expecting obedience."

"That man has a taste for tyranny," thought Cotton, but he quite agreed with his theory.

"Let us walk round the garden," said the gardener. "You will not object to give me your arm."

They loitered through it, and in noble order it was for the season of the year. Cotton noted that when they approached any man at work he accelerated his pace even more promptly than even if his master had been a man unsmitten by blindness. The gardener seemed to know by some new sense the condition of all the various beds and houses, and often remarked on them in words so apposite that Cotton was quite amazed at what seemed like divination.

"How are your mushrooms, Anemone?" he said,

as they looked in upon the long lines of shelves where they were growing white as snow.

The child, by way of reply, brought him a perfect specimen, with a lovely pink blush on its under side; and the gardener said:—

“Send up some of the choicest. This gentleman will stay to dine.”

“I ought to go back to London,” said Cotton. “I do not think I can stay to dine.”

The gardener laughed.

“O yes you can. You were thrown over my hedge for some real purpose, depend on it. It must be divined at least. It may be something which you dream not of.”

Cotton felt quite disposed to see his adventure to its end, and readily gave way. They had a long lounge through the gardens, which were of great extent, and capitally kept. “*Oculus domini saginat equum*,” says a well-known Latin adage; but in this case it was manifestly not the master’s eye, but the master’s presence, which did the business. He was surprised to see that a man without eyesight could thus control a difficult business.

Cotton, who was only too glad of something to occupy him, enjoyed his wandering through these gardens, enjoyed also the quaint gardener’s most eccentric talk, and felt on the whole thankful that

he had been thrown over a hedge into an asparagus bed and odd company. Many curious occurrences amused him in the course of the day. There was a carriage-drive right through the nursery, so that any visitors might come close to the chief conservatories; and in the afternoon a good many visitors came. By this time Hyacinth and Ixia had given up their out-door work, and were busy manufacturing exquisite tiny bouquets for male button-holes, and splendid flower-fancies for female hands to hold. It was pretty to see them. The gardener found himself with much to do, for he always looked after his important customers. So Charles Cotton, after watching with much amusement the way in which swells paid their button-hole half-crowns and their guineas for ladies' bouquets, strolled away by himself, carrying the thought in his brain that, as money *must* be wasted, it may be wasted on worse things than flowers.

Wandering thus in a part of the grounds away from the great conservatories, he came suddenly upon little Anemone, who was busily picking herbs. She looked up with a merry smile, and said,

"These are for something or other mamma is making for your dinner. Come and see what she is going to do with them."

Cotton went with the little girl, and at the old-

fashioned kitchen porch, covered with creepers, was greeted by Perdita, who chanced to be waiting for these same herbs. She had covered herself with a cook's apron, and stood there in the afternoon sunlight just like a cook in a comedy. She made Cotton a very elegant mock curtsy, and said,

"This young hussy has kept me waiting for the herbs I wanted; but I trust you will like your dinner, sir."

Yes, there she was, in the quaint cottage kitchen, cooking the dinner, with no help but that of little Anemone; and the kitchen, to Charles Cotton, seemed ennobled by her presence, and she looked to him like a goddess who was cooking a dinner for fun.

"Now," she said, "I am sure you are hungry, wandering about those gardens with the Master. He never gets tired, but he tires other people. Sit down and have some soup in a homely way."

So Cotton sat down to the deal kitchen table, and very much enjoyed the plate of soup set before him on the instant — which was not remarkable, since good gravy-beef furnished the foundation, while oysters and celery gave it flavour. And the cook found him a glass of wine too — excellent Bucellas.

"Now tell me," said Perdita, looking at Cotton

with a strange smile, "which do you take to be the oddest person—the Master or I? He has told you our story, I am certain. I saw he meant to; he needed some one to confide it to. Whatever he has told you is true, for he could not lie. He has never asked me who I am; I believe he has never tried to guess. And it really does not matter; I am only a silly woman, who was arrested by what seems a miraculous accident on the brink of a downward career, which must have ended horribly. You see I speak frankly."

"But this must be a happy life," said Cotton, who could not help feeling the idyllic beauty of the calm garden, with its regular succession of work. The great conservatories blazed in the sunshine, sheets of radiant hyaline with masses of many-coloured bloom beneath. They looked as change-ful under the shifting light as Love's versicoloured wings, described by Virgil, *Catalecta* vi. 9. It seemed to him that nothing could be more charming than such an existence.

"Happiness," said Perdita, "is the creature of the mind. I feel content: but to be happy there must be no ugly blot on the memory, no haunting ghost of a past remorse. I don't know," she said, with a smile, "why I talk in this way to you, a youthful stranger, except indeed that I know the

Master has been telling you the curious tale. I am quiet here; I am glad to serve him; I like those quaint three daughters of mine; I like the fruit, the flowers, the tranquil life. But the past is eternal."

I should say that Perdita looked more like Mrs. Siddons as a cook of tragedy than anything else. But Cotton knew nothing of Mrs. Siddons, and he felt that he was in the presence of a very wonderful woman. Devoid till quite lately of any experience of the great world, he was slightly bewildered. He thought to himself that it would be rather pleasant to live in such a place, and mend the glass of the conservatories and the pipes of the hot-water apparatus. Very delightful! Only he couldn't live anywhere without Cis Englehurst.

"Well, I must return to my cooking," she said. "I hope you will find amusement till dinner-time."

"No fear," he answered. "This garden is inexhaustible."

He wandered away through its labyrinthine avenues, and enjoyed the time. At intervals he came across little Anemone, who was occupied in multitudinous divisions of business. He was amused at this little garden-fairy, who, withal her *petit nez retroussé*, was a nice specimen of the modern hamadryad.

The dinner was to be at six, and notwithstand-

ing the flavourous basin of soup which he had received at the imperial Perdita's fair hands, Cotton's healthy appetite began to feel renewal. Healthy hunger is among the most fortunate faculties of youth. When you no longer enjoy your bread and cheese and beer, my reader, consider there is something wrong; perchance you are overfagged, or overnagged by a cantankerous wife, or do not work your brain and your muscle enough. We are the victims of overwork and underwork. Society is so disorganised that some men are always overworked, and they wither away into mere atomies; and some are underworked, and they get as fat as an old lady's pug dog; and few, ah, how few! get exactly the amount of work which is good for them, or the kind which they can do best. I will say this for Charles Cotton—he would gladly have put in panes of glass for the remainder of his life, if only through each pane he could see the lovely face of Cecilia Englehurst.

Dinner time arrived, and the gardener and his guest sat down to a pleasant meal, which I will not describe, (1) because I am accused of such descriptions too often; and the *Spectator* declared, when criticising my "Seven Village Songs" in *Blackwood*, that no other man had ever dared to put a cutlet into a love-lyric; (2) because that dinner never came to an end, and Anemone's choicest mushrooms were

spoilt. Just as Perdita, with her air of regal servitude, had set the first dish on the table, and retreated to the kitchen for its accessories, there came a fierce flash of lightning, striking like the sword of an archangel across the open window. The gardener saw it not; but in a few seconds came a reverberating peal of thunder, which made him spring to his feet, just as Perdita re-entered the room. He went straight to the open window and faced the sky.

"Lightning and thunder drive him wild," whispered Perdita. "He has a mad thought that, as a thunderstorm destroyed his eyesight, a thunderstorm may restore it. Keep near him, for my sake; I dare not speak to him now."

So Cotton went to the window and looked at the storm. It was one of those storms for which London is famous. The mighty cities of the earth draw down the mighty storms of the sky. The gardener stood there, rapt; striving to gaze into the infinite black depths of space; striving to see lightning. He saw it not. His blank eyeballs refused to perceive the Promethean fire. Yet it crossed the sky in lines which seemed as if they would cut the firmament in two, and set the world alight.

This was the vanguard of the glorious storm; the cavalry of light which moved fiercely to the front. Then came a huge and heavy bank of clouds,

a park of heaven's artillery. The gardener heard the mighty thunder-claps; he could not see the lightning, and that saddened him.

"Oh," he cried, "if only I could see lightning again!"

As he spoke, there came a swift zigzag flash and loud thunder the instant after. And then, hail! It fell, formed by the electric force in thunderclouds, with great swiftness; the ground was in a moment white with it. The stones were some as large as pigeon's eggs. They could hear them from the window where they stood crashing into the conservatories as if they were Prussian artillery.

"I shan't have a pane of glass left to-morrow," said the gardener.

"How lucky that I am a glazier!" said Charles Cotton.

CHAPTER XVI.

AFTER THE STORM.

ASTROLOGOS.—Nothing is half so glorious as a thunderstorm.

ALOUETTE.—O yes, papa, a thunderstorm is exquisite,

If you have only some one's arm around your waist.

The Comedy of Dreams.

THE gardener's night was an excited one. The influx of a tremendous tempest of hail is a terrible matter for a garden with half an acre of glass. He and Cotton and his men went out to discover what could be done, but blinding showers of heavy hail descended, and they were absolutely driven back and routed. The most famous poetic gardener of the day wrote to me a year or two ago, saying that an army of wasps, led by a generalissimo in the shape of an enormous hornet, had fairly driven him out of his orchard house. That was a trifle to the advent of this destructive hail, which crashed through multitudinous panes of glass, cut up vines and flowers, and did infinite damage.

"Nothing can be done," said the gardener.
"Send the girls to bed, Perdita."

"O no, no, please not, dear papa," said little Anemone. "I could not sleep. I should be quite miserable in bed."

"Well," said the gardener to Charles Cotton, "do you feel disposed to stay up awhile and watch the storm? It will roar itself out at midnight, I prophesy, and leave me without a pane of glass or a Muscat grape. What matter? I have always been the sport of fortune. Jupiter Pluvius is to me no novelty. Perdita, as we have not dined, let us have something devilled, and brew a bowl of punch, and we will try to imagine we are happy."

There was a pleasant midnight. Perdita lighted a fire with logs of young ash—

"Ash when green
Is fire for a queen—"

and the three children set to work to give help, which help they gave dexterously. A silver gridiron was placed on the fire, with a splendid young capon spaich-cocked upon it; and little Hyacinth knelt down and cooked slices of bacon on a toasting fork till her pretty face was abnormally hot and red. All the while the gardener and Charles Cotton were calmly smoking cigars. All the while the hail was descending in a deluge, and the roof gave token of its fall, and there was crash of glass till it seemed

no glass was left to be crashed. All the while the lightning flashed so fiercely that it seemed as if the heavy curtains must take fire—the thunder reverberated so loudly that they could hardly hear each other speak.

Charles Cotton, having a tendency to study human nature, was much amused with his company. The despotic gardener, the imperial and imperious Perdita, were well worth study. He, lying back in his easy chair, with blinded eyes, listened to the elemental roar, and wondered what strange destruction would meet other eyes to-morrow. She, knowing well that he, the gardener, was after all more important than all the glass in his greenhouse, took the greatest care to make him comfortable, and brewed his punch with as much care as she browned the legs of his capon, all piquant with French mustard and Nepaul pepper. Cotton, watching her, wondered much at her. She might have been a queen, and chose to be a slave.

Great fun was it for Hyacinth and Ixia and Anemone to be up half the night because the greenhouses were smashed by a hailstorm. These young things don't know what money trouble means. Why should they? It was for them just a period of excitement; the fragments of capon and bacon and cinnamon in punch delighted them; above all, they

were to sit up. When I was a boy I have had to sit up all night for the purpose of travelling by a mail coach that started at four or five in the morning. I am no longer a boy, and I certainly should not do it now. But to children who usually go to bed at eight the notion of a late night is perfectly delightful, and these three girls were so excited that at intervals Perdita was compelled to calm them.

Soon after midnight, as the gardener had predicted, the storm had roared itself away. The thunder grew fainter and fainter, like the artillery of a retreating army. The three girls were by this time fast asleep on a large red velvet sofa which stood by the fire—a quaint group of happy sleepers, whose apparel was not so well ordered, nor their *pose* so artistic, as those of Tennyson's Sleeping Beauty. One after the other had given way to our old friend Morpheus, the god of many forms. Little Anemone was the last to drop soft lids over drowsy childish eyes. Perhaps this child, named from the windflower, had stronger sympathy with the winds than her elder sisters. Charles Cotton said something of the kind to the gardener, as he watched them falling asleep one after the other, and his host agreed with him.

"I have always held," he said, "that Christian names have something to do with destiny, where the

creature christened hath a sensitive soul. Every Emily is a flirt, and every Mary Ann, or Sarah Jane, a born maid-servant. You may say that my daughters have Pagan rather than Christian names. At any rate, they all have meaning. Now I had no classic right to call that elder child Hyacinth, since Hyacinthus was a boy. When playing quoits with Apollo, jealous Zephyrus threw a quoit in such a way as to kill the handsome youth. 'Tis only the way the Greeks had of expressing natural truths. A hyacinth caught by the wind when the sun is on it must surely die. Well, my little Hyacinth justified her baptism, for she is a regular little tomboy; and I believe she made acquaintance with you not at all shyly."

"She was uncommonly kind," said Cotton. "I owe to her a most pleasant day, and a night even pleasanter."

Perdita said nothing, but she looked quite gratefully at Cotton, for her greatest delight in life was to make her rescuer happy.

"A pleasant night without any sleep," said the gardener. "Tobacco instead of dreams."

"A fortunate substitute now and then," said Cotton. "Dreams form upon the smoke wreaths; once or twice to-night the white vapour rose in air

like a lovely lady whom I have seen dressed in white."

Perdita smiled.

"Ha! in love, my friend. You begin early. But now for names. Little Ixia is named from the chameleon-plant, which changes colour according to its soil, and a most changeable child she is. One day she is as good as gold, and another as mischievous as a monkey. She has to be kissed in the morning and whipped in the afternoon. And as to Anemone, she is, you see, a lover of the winds."

As they talked the storm retreated, and they went to the front door. The heavy black clouds had passed away, and a bright full moon was in the zenith. The water was still running down the gravel paths; the plants looked drenched and miserable; great gaps could be seen in the greenhouse glass. It was a strange scene.

As they stood silently looking at the moon, a shadow touched its rim.

"What is that?" said Cotton. "Not a cloud."

"The shadow of the earth," said Perdita. "There is an eclipse of the moon to-night. The storm caused me to forget it."

"I have never seen an eclipse," said Cotton.

"I shall never see another," observed the gardener; "but I well remember when I was a school-

boy being delighted to sit up all night and watch one. The fact is fixed on my mind because a tame jackdaw that I kept took the opportunity to drown himself. He was anti-astronomical, I expect. They make a great fuss about eclipses, these astronomers; but after all it is, as Perdita says, merely the passing of a shadow. There is a fine couplet of Shelley's:—

‘As when some great painter dips
His pencil in the hues of earthquake and eclipse.’”

“I have never read Shelley,” said Cotton.

“A man who has never seen an eclipse or read Shelley is a black swan. What have you done, my friend?”

“Put in many panes of glass in my time, so that perhaps to-morrow I may be of some use to you.”

“Thanks,” said the gardener; “I will with pleasure accept your aid. I wonder if there could by any chance be a connexion between the eclipse and the thunder-storm? The old historians connected earthquakes and comets with unusual events. If they were right—and I am not prepared to say they were not—I look forward to the year 1897.”

“Why?” asked Cotton.

“Because there will be no eclipses either of the sun or moon.”

"Let us hope we shall reach that miraculous year," replied Cotton.

By this time the moon's silver disc was completely obscured by the shadow of our fast-flying planet, which travels so swiftly that we cannot perceive her movement—her pace being between sixteen and seventeen miles a second, or about sixty thousand miles an hour. Few people realise this rapid travel; even as few people know that the music of the spheres is in so high a key as to be inaudible to mortal ears.

The moon was now entirely obscure. Cotton reported progress to the gardener. Perdita spoke little; the beauty of this sky movement seemed to render her more silent than usual, silent as she always was. The great trouble and terror of her life had driven back into her heart the natural fresh feelings of a woman in her prime; and her chief thought was to enslave herself willingly to her rescuer, whom she regarded much as a heathen regarded his own special patron among the gods of his pantheon. Remorse and gratitude mingled; admiration for him, and contempt for the two villains who caused her disgrace—these were her perpetual spur to action. That he should have lost his eyesight at such a moment, to save her from dishonour

—he to whom the light of the sun was a divine delight—and that he should never say a discontented word, was to her an endless pain. What could she do for him but humbly serve? He could not love her, she knew, for he could love no woman who had done what she had done. And his tyranny was very pleasant. He *would* have his way. Even before the days of Petruchio it was pretty well known that women like a man who *will* have his way.

The shadow of the earth began to leave the moon.

“Let us go to bed, Perdita,” said the gardener. “Let us snatch an hour or two of sleep before sunrise. Leave the children on their sofa; it would be a shame to wake them. Show Mr. Cotton his room.”

When Charles Cotton awoke next morning, which was about five, he beheld a delightful autumnal day, with not a breath of trouble in the air. He got down and out into the gardens before the gardener rose. He looked at the conservatories, and saw there had been desperate damage from the merciless hail. He found out the nearest glazier, got a shelf of glass and some putty, and was soon up a ladder, putting in glass with a dexterous hand. When the gardener came out he would not stop for breakfast,

and would only interrupt himself to drink a glass of bitter ale, handed up to him on his ladder. He worked all day with great resolve. The three flower-christened girls aided him, bringing him the various materials of his trade as he needed them, and being indeed almost too eager to help. There was Hyacinth with glass, and Ixia with putty, and Anemone with anything she could find. And then, as he refused to go into the house for lunch, seeing that he was in the middle of work, Perdita brought him a basin of soup and some sherry, which he took very comfortably on his ladder, then returning to his work.

Charles Cotton had never in his life put in so many panes of glass as he put in that day. It was a thorough piece of hard work. When it was over he was confoundedly tired. He made his final descent from the oft-moved ladder, feeling that he had got through the worst of his work. As he descended, Hyacinth (who had hardly for a moment deserted him) was there to receive him: he was cramped by working all day in an unusual position, and the little tomboy offered him her arm, and piloted him home with much kindness. A good girl, Hyacinth. Yet! Well, she could not help liking Charles Cotton a trifle too much—which is very improper for your girls of sixteen? and he somehow could not help

seeing it in her tell-tale eyes; and then he thought of Cis Englehurst. Hyacinth was a nice little garden flower. Cis was a goddess—to Cotton, any way. Ah me, that magic casement! That pane of glass which brought the pain of love!

Strange! As he and Hyacinth went down the garden path to the cottage, there stood a carriage and pair in front of one of the conservatories, and in that carriage indolently lounged the Marquis de Castelcicala. No mistaking that handsome Italian. He was in a reverie. His companion, whoever that companion might have been, had gone into the conservatory. He had manifestly not been interested enough to follow her—for of course it was a *her*. As Cotton and Hyacinth passed, he chanced to see them, descended from the carriage, and said,

“I did not expect to see you here. Wait a few moments. I want to talk to you.”

The Marquis went into the conservatory. He paid a courteous adieu to the lady with whom he had come down, telling her that an accident rendered it impossible for him to return with her to Park Lane. As it had been an accidental meeting, an accidental parting was its natural *sequitur*.

Then he strolled down between the espaliers to where Hyacinth, a funny little *espiègle* flower, was loitering with Cotton.

"Odd that I should be here, Cotton," he said. "Please introduce me to this charming young lady."

"Her name is Hyacinth," said Cotton.

"The goddess Flora named her," said the Marquis. "I came here with a lady whom I know very slightly, and who wanted to buy a bouquet of some greenhouse flowers. I have shaken myself free of her since. She is a casual acquaintance, whom I am only compelled to know by reason of etiquette. Hence I was glad of an excuse to talk with you. I came up from Erlingham because we have a little further information; but the Squire is getting tired of the whole business. He wants to buy Miss Cecilia some more diamonds, and make her forget the others were stolen. I dare say it would be the wiser plan."

"If a thief can be found, punish that thief," said Cotton. "What do you say, Hyacinth?"

"Where hyacinths grow there will be thieves," said the Marquis. "The prettiest flowers are the soonest stolen. For my own part I prefer a hyacinth to a diamond."

Hyacinth, a rustic maiden unaccustomed to such courtliness of speech, blushed a little as the Marquis spoke. She was puzzled, as well she might be, 'twixt Cotton and Castelcicala. They were both

unintelligible folk to this little nymph of the garden. She liked them both, but she could not understand them; and when a woman cannot understand a man, she is apt to draw an entirely inaccurate picture of him.

The result was that they walked round the garden, and enjoyed it much. Castelvicala had never before seen a splendid English nursery ground, such as no other country can produce. You cannot grow a melon or a peach, a pineapple or a nectarine, out of England, even in the Orient realms wherein those delicious fruits were invented. It was wondrous to see the gardener's muscat grapes, of both colours, hanging from the glass roof—his peaches grown upon trees in pots, and ripening for dessert. The Marquis enjoyed all this; but as a student of character, he even more enjoyed little Hyacinth, a child who had grown to sixteen amid fruit and flowers. She was just a flower. A simple girl-flower, who loved other flowers. A boy-girl, her father averred; but with no atom of harm in her.

After wandering through the grounds, and witnessing the dilapidations, they came down towards the house. There everything was quiet. The gardener himself, after making a visitation of his whole demesne, had settled down in his easy-chair, feeling abominably tired. Ixia and Anemone were quite

alive, and welcomed Hyacinth and the Marquis delightedly. Perdita, the queenly Martha of the household, on hospitable cares intent, was not at the moment visible.

A very few words put the Marquis and the gardener *en rapport*. It is a matter to be remarked that the ethereal tincture of the soul is the same all through. A tailor or a cobbler who does his work well is on the same level as a general or statesman who does his work well. These two men understood each other instantaneously. And here were three men, an Italian marquis, an English gardener, and an English glazier, who got on well from the first. "What condescension in the Marquis!" says Boots de Boots, whose great grandfather was a waiter at Boodles'. I don't see it. I honour a good English workman as much as I honour a true English gentleman. Both are perfect in their kind. They are convertible. Cannot a gentleman be a workman, or a workman a gentleman?

They sat together and talked, the children quietly listening. The gardener would have no breach of discipline among his young folk. Hyacinth and Ixia and Anemone lived a happy life; but they had to work hard out of doors, and to obey their father and Perdita implicitly. They did it with the happy industry and obedience of love. They were good little

rogues, who would in due time make excellent wives for somebody. I am thankful that it is not my present duty, as a novelist, to marry them.

"I came here by accident," said the Marquis, "with a lady whom I met by accident. Then I met my friend Cotton, who has been telling me how your thunder-storm cut you up, and that he had been able to help you, of which I was very glad. Then I met Miss Hyacinth, and thought what a lovely name she had. You have a most delightful corner here."

"It is well enough," said the gardener. "I try to be content. I can smell my roses and taste my nectarines; but I can see nothing. I cannot, indeed, see whether these little hussies of mine behave properly; but I know they are good girls."

They were all three around the blind old man's knees that moment.

"Blind Thamyras and blind Maeonides,
And Tiresias, and Phineas, prophets old,"

were probably not unlike our friend the gardener. Knowledge at one entrance quite shut out, is extremely unsatisfactory; but a good many blind men have been of vast use in the world. There is much to be said for Homer and Milton.

It was well this night that the gardener was

blind. His three flower-christened children were crouching around his knees. Cotton was sitting opposite. The Marquis de Castalcicala leant on the mantel-piece on one arm.

Entered, pale and silent, Perdita.

Castalcicala *almost* went forward as if to embrace her. But he kept himself back, saying under his breath—

“My God! Impossible!”

CHAPTER XVII.

AMELIA'S IMPRISONMENT.

Sure, silliness is often worse than naughtiness,
Which in the long run gets the sharper punishment.

THAT Amelia Laing had not run away with Charles Cotton we are aware.

As a fact, she had been driven wild by her father and mother, and had thought of doing something desperate. She was, however, saved the trouble. Mr. Laing, early on the morning of the day when Cotton and his daughter had so terribly shocked his exquisite refinement by the scene in the greenhouse, went to his daughter's room, and ordered her to dress, saying that he was about to take her to stay with a friend.

"I do not approve of your conduct with that young workman, Amelia," he said to the girl. "I intend you to go away for a time. Your mamma fully agrees with me. Dress at once, and let your maid pack a few things for you."

Amelia was only half awake. She could not

help rejoicing at the thought of going anywhere for a change. Home was a weary imprisonment, with a perpetual quarrel on hand. The girl was a match for her father; but her mother would not allow her to defend her; and so this hoyden grew tired of her position, and dreamily welcomed anything for a change. She sprang out of bed and dressed rapidly, wondering the while whither she was destined to go. Gawky and awkward and dull though she was, there was the making of a fine woman, some day, in Amelia Laing. She was as true as her father was false, as brave as her mother was weak.

Mr. Laing got his daughter away that morning without the knowledge of her mother and the general household. The maid who waited on her was a little Irishwoman, very demure and sly, who was in his confidence, and acted under his orders. When Amelia told her to pack some things for her, she said,

“Why, Miss, are you going away?”

“Yes, Ella, for a day or two, I think. I shall be very glad of a change. I wish you were coming with me.”

“I wish I was, Miss. I’m sure a change will do you good.”

Laing had ordered the plausible minx to talk

cheerfully to his daughter. Presently he came into her room and said,

"Don't disturb your mamma, Amelia; she is fast asleep. There is a fly at the door, and Ella will take your bag down. I will ride over to the station. I have some letters to write. In case I am late, here is some money to take your ticket to London. I shall be there before the train starts, but you had better get into a carriage; and, if I don't happen to be in the same, we shall meet at Paddington."

Thus it happened, through Laing's adroitness and Ella's connivance, that Amelia was supposed to have gone off by herself, with her pious parent hot in pursuit. This figment gathered strength from the fact that Mr. Laing took no leave of his wife; so that the weak woman, when she missed both father and daughter, was in a state of agonised wonderment. When she rang her bell, Ella answered it, with a sly look on her plausible face.

"Please, m'm," she said, "master told me to tell you he was gone to the station, and perhaps should have to go to London. He didn't want you disturbed. Miss Amelia's run away, and he's gone to find her."

"The wicked girl!" she said, shedding a torrent of tears. "To leave the best and kindest father that

ever lived! O Ella, if you ever marry, I hope you'll get half as good a husband."

As Ella, being a perspicacious Irish lass, with full opportunity of judging Mr. Laing's character, did not quite agree in his wife's estimate, she only said,

"Yes, m'm, he *is* a gentleman, if there was ever a gentleman out of Ireland."

Laing got to the station just as the train was starting; indeed, he had purposely made it so close a thing that he had no time to take a ticket, and was obliged to pay at the end of his journey. His daughter, who had for once obeyed orders, saw him get into a carriage, and was satisfied. She had but one fellow-passenger, an elderly gentleman, who read the City article of the *Times* with intense care.

When they reached the terminus Mr. Laing greeted his daughter with unusual kindness. A brougham was ready, and they drove away. Amelia knew nothing of London. The crowded streets and multitudinous houses were a wonder to her, almost a terror. She had a dull, faint feeling, this girl, that she had something in her which wouldn't come out. She felt that she ought to understand many things which she could not understand, her father among the rest. Her eyes were wide open, I dare

say her mouth also, as the brougham rapidly cut through London, and stopped at last at the gates of a very pleasant-looking villa on the Surrey side of the river.

The gates were opened. They drove up to the front of the house. The lawn and garden were charmingly kept. Amelia could not help exclaiming, "What a pretty place!" though she seldom said much to her father.

"Yes," he said, "and Mrs. Grimes is a charming old lady, and I think you will be sure to like the Misses Grimes."

Amelia had not heard these ineuphonious names before. She and her father were shown into a handsome drawing-room, where Mrs. Grimes and one of her daughters received them. The old lady was small, white-haired, with catlike eyes; indeed, Amelia at once thought she looked like a cat. The daughter was a tall girl, with a general look of power; her hair was light, her development Penthesilean. She might, as I have heard a small gentleman of my acquaintance say of his stalwart sweetheart, have taken a man up and thrown him on to the roof of the house. I wonder these small gentlemen, so fond of giant wives, are not a little afraid of quasi-paternal discipline.

There was tea, and a chat, and presently Mr.

Laing left, having business to do. He had, in fact, to face Crake, and extract money from that scoundrel by telling him a lie that he hoped might become truth. He saw possibilities in Amelia. Tall beyond the average height of woman, awkward by reason thereof, the child hardly knew what to do with herself. He now, under a false pretence, left her with Mrs. Grimes, an old lady who for years uncounted had made a fine income by turning hoydens and awkward giglots into young gentlewomen. Poor Amelia had not the least idea where she was; she imagined merely a visit to a friend of her father's; she was amazed and horrified when old Mrs. Grimes (who looked uncommonly like a wicked old fairy) said, in a harsh voice,

"Susanna, let this child go to bed."

Susanna Grimes rang a bell: to Amelia's amazement it was answered by her old friend Jane Vincent, who, however, looked at her as if she had never seen her before in all her life. Amelia had sufficient presence of mind to take the cue. Miss Grimes said: "Miss Vincent, this is a new pupil. Let her sleep in your room to-night."

Amelia, who had not yet regarded herself as a pupil, was puzzled, and inwardly inclined to be rebellious. She was slow, you see, but she began to understand that her father had played her a cowardly

trick. When she saw her old friend Jenny Vincent she kept quiet, though she felt a fierce passion against those who had conspired to place her in this position. She knew she was not too old to be at school; but she despised her father for the cowardly way in which he had carried out his design of placing her there. However, seeing her old friend, she was silent, and followed her without a word. She was led to a very comfortable double-bedded room.

"How *did* you come here?" said Jenny Vincent. "Whisper, dear; no talking is allowed."

"How did *you* come here?" she retaliated.

"O, I am a governess, you know. It is a capital place, and I get good pay. But, now, tell me why you are here."

"Papa never told me it was a school, or anything. He said he wanted me to have a change, and would take me to visit a friend. And it *is* a school, is it, Jenny?"

"Yes, you dear little stupid, it is. It is a school specially intended for naughty girls, or, as Mrs. Grimes puts it in her prospectus, for young ladies of the patrician classes unfortunately endowed with ungovernable idiosyncrasies. Now, I don't know, of course, what your dear amiable father has said of you, but that old Grimes is a thoroughly cruel cat, so you had better make up your mind to be a very

good girl indeed. She has many quaint devices in punishment, and her daughters are almost as clever as she is."

"How lucky I was to find you here, Jenny dear! I begin to hate papa. He might be honest."

"My dear old father, who made his living by selling newspapers, used to say that it was very hard to be honest now-a-day, if you wished to live. Still, I think he was straight enough. Now I mean to be dishonest to-night. I am ordered to make you generally uncomfortable, but I won't, for I know you don't deserve it. *Have* you been doing anything very dreadful lately?"

"Well, there was a glazier at work in the greenhouse, and he fell off a ladder and hurt himself, and I asked cook to give him some brandy, and papa pretended it was very wicked. I don't know anything else."

"I hope he is good-looking," said Miss Vincent. "I like handsome men. You see, Amelia, I'm nobody, and of no family, and can do as I please, or rather I *could* do as I please, if I had plenty of money. So I should not hesitate for a moment to fall in love with a handsome man, though he were only a glazier. But you must think of the high respectability of your people. Glass is brittle, my child."

A curious contrast were these two young women as they conversed together. Jenny Vincent's monkey-like quickness differed widely from the rather stolid and sullen character of Amelia. Jenny was much amused at the situation. She had not been long at Mrs. Grimes's Seminary, but during the time she had seen that the old lady's notions of discipline were not very lenient. Her pupils were generally spoilt children of good family—often the daughters of officers absent in India. They came to school for the most part with very lofty ideas of their own importance, having been waited upon with great deference all their lives. Mrs. Grimes just reversed the picture. She made these pouting peevish aristocrats do real work. The education was elegant; the fare was perfect; there were pleasant evening entertainments; but if a girl were restive, she was made to scrub a floor, or polish a grate, or clean the shoes of her schoolfellows. It was vain for her to refuse, as a fare of bread and water soon brought her to her senses.

Jenny Vincent explained all this to Amelia in a low whisper, lest perchance they might be overheard. She was anxious to save her young friend from all trouble and humiliation. Amelia was wild with indignation that her father should have treated her in such a way, and vowed she would not stay

in the house another moment. Jenny feared she would do something foolish.

"You silly creature!" she said. "Can't you trust in me? I am trying to make things easy for you. If I were to ring the bell a couple of maid-servants would come, and you would be locked up in a dark room all night, to be brought before Mrs. Grimes in the morning. You will be very comfortable here, if you are wise, and you will have me to talk to; if you don't listen to common sense, I shall think you really are in love with that confounded young glazier. Why, you ought to think yourself very lucky to meet me here. If you hadn't, I don't know what might have happened to you."

"I am not afraid," said Amelia, who had both strength and courage. "I think I can take my own part pretty well. I am so disgusted with papa. If he had said he wanted me to go to school I should have been glad enough, for I know I am very ignorant. What am I to do, Jenny?"

"Do what I tell you exactly. If Mrs. Grimes finds a girl indolent or disobedient she punishes her in some way that is sure to make her remember it. But if a girl does her work and gives no trouble, she is thoroughly kind. Now can't you pretend to be better than you are for a time, and conciliate the old lady, who will at once think your father has

been treating you badly? I don't see why you should not be twice as happy here as you were at home, except, of course, for that glazier."

"What a little wretch you are!" she said. "Wouldn't you have got some brandy for a man who had fallen off his ladder?"

"Of course I should, if he was young and handsome, which no doubt was the case with your glass-mending hero. But now you must go to bed, child. I have already allowed you to stay chattering longer than I ought. My orders are very strict, and I have broken through them because I like you."

"You are always kind, Jenny," she said.

"Well, I like you, Amelia, because you are such an obstinate little goose. And I think there is more in you than you know yourself. My father, who was a philosopher—do you know what that is?"

"I suppose it means he sold newspapers."

"You little muff! Never mind: he used to say that half the girls of the day would be a deal wiser if they were properly treated. His idea of properly treating me when I was troublesome, which was pretty often, was a touch or two with a slight cane."

"What a shame!" said Amelia indignantly. "I would not own such a father."

"Upon my word," said Jenny Vincent, laughing,

"you are too absurd, Amelia. I deserved all I got, for I was a pert little minx, and he was a dear wise old father. Wasn't that better than your father's taking you in a sly way to a school where you may perhaps be treated in the same way, if you give any trouble?"

"What!" said Amelia. "Dare not say such a thing."

"Don't talk so loud, you tiresome girl. I shall give you up if you won't be good. Now listen to me. To-morrow you are to treat me with great respect, as if you were dreadfully afraid of me; and you are to go on doing that, regularly. You are not to speak to me in the class-rooms without a curtsy. I want to keep you out of mischief, and if you do all I tell you there will be no difficulty. Always do exactly what I tell you. Do you agree?"

"I do," said Amelia.

"Now go to bed, then; and remember that in the presence of others I shall speak to you quite harshly, and you must take it quite humbly. You understand?"

"I think I do."

So they went to bed, Jenny Vincent hoping that she had made Amelia, for whom she had a strong liking, understand her position; while Amelia herself, cheated as she had been by her father, felt that she

was alone in the world except for Jenny. Jenny was soon asleep, but Amelia lay long awake, wondering. She was slow, but it was the slowness of an ungrown undeveloped brain. In fact, this gawky girl had run to height and weight; had been forming body at the expense of brain. A good judge might have divined a statue in the marble, and predicted that she would be a fine woman at forty—before which age a fine woman is almost impossible. Now, with a dim gas-jet burning, she looked round the room with its two white beds, and thought over her position. Her bed had its head towards the front wall of the house, so that the window was close beside it. Jenny was breathing quiet breath, and sleeping a tranquil sleep in the opposite corner of the room, taken diagonally. A very clear conscience had Jenny Vincent, and a splendid digestion; so, when she slept, it was sleep of the right sort. She had no troubles; she was only a governess, even as her father was only a newspaper dealer; but they did their duty in their special grooves. Jenny was not pretty; indeed, she had one of those quaint faces which the majority of folk deem ugly; but, as she lay with her head above her arm on the pillow, and her breast moving slowly to the music of sleep and the wonder of dream, I think some spectators would have said "That's the very little girl for me." It would be hard upon Amelia to describe her

in this delicate situation, seeing that she was utterly unformed. To-night she could not sleep. Her new position worried her. She hated her father's deceit. She tossed and turned upon her bed, and envied Jenny, who was doing a little musical snore in the contrary corner. I often think that the human nose (especially the female human nose) might be educated into a musical instrument that would beat the flute out and out. Ladies who can snore musically may communicate with the author, who will bring the matter before the Royal Academy of Music.

This world is full of coincidences. How often you meet a man who ought to have been your father, only your mother refused him! How often the man who ought to have been your father has a great deal more landed property than the man who was! How often you meet the clerical cad you despise just round the very corner where you strolled to avoid him! How often an old schoolfellow whom you had tunded in your boyhood turns up from Australia, and suggests that he should like to borrow five pounds! How often the editor of some periodical to which you send an article happens just to have acquired another on the same subject by a very high authority! How often the lady whom you ask to marry has just a few hours before engaged herself to your dearest friend or fiercest enemy!

This dissertation is designed to lead to a very curious coincidence, not to be omitted from this truthful narrative! I hope my readers remember Cis Englehurst's adventure, and how the Slippery One and the Parson came to grief over their attack upon her bedchamber. These two worthies had as yet eluded the police, even with Castalcicala's aid; and Crake thought it was time for them to do something fresh; and he indicated an ostentatious City man, who dressed his wife in most aggressive diamonds. Slippery Jack and the Parson were quite willing; and marked down the place. Unluckily for them, they made a mistake. The stockbroker with the be-diamonded wife lived in a row of detached villas, each much like the other. Next door to him was the highly-exclusive seminary of Miss Grimes. Slippery Jack and his friend, the Parson, by ill-luck turned into the garden of the seminary. Their programme was, to enter the stockbroker's room, which was on the second floor front, by means of a rope ladder, to frighten him and his wife into silence and non-resistance by the exhibition of revolvers, and to walk away with the diamonds. The cleverest men make mistakes.

They got their rope ladder up quietly enough to the window of the room in which Jenny Vincent and Amelia Laing were in bed—I can't say *slept*, for

Amelia was sleepless. She was thinking over her position; wondering why her father had been so cruel; trying to think what she should do if Miss Grimes became tyrannical. Under the pressure of a new trouble this child's slowly-developing brain became more workable, and she thought with clearness hitherto unknown to her. And, while she was thus thinking, little did she know that Slippery Jack, having reached the top of the ladder, and placed against a pane of glass a piece of brown paper smeared with treacle, was noiselessly breaking that pane. It was soon done. Then he opened the window fastening, threw it up, and sprang into the room.

Amelia's nerves were high-strung. She had gone through a troublous day: her thoughts were growing clearer, her courage greater. Moreover, she felt her latent physical power. When the Slippery One entered the room, she jumped out of bed and caught him by the throat. She was a young tigress suddenly aroused to wrath. The Slippery One's revolver went off as he fell upon the floor, and the bullets impinged on the opposite wall. Jenny Vincent, awoke by the noise, sat up in bed in an amazed state. The Parson had of course decamped when he saw the state of affairs. He was not the man to put his pious person in peril for any friend.

All the inhabitants of the seminary, in various states of undress, were quickly on the spot when those pistol shots were heard. A passing policeman heard the noise, saw the light in the window, climbed the rope-ladder, and threw his bull's-eye on a curious tableau—many feminine folk in light attire crowding into a bedroom, where a tall girl in the lightest attire of all held a scoundrel by the throat, with her foot upon his breast. A regular heroine looked Amelia, who thought of nothing but the deed she had to do, and did not consider her airy costume even when the policeman entered and deftly put the handcuffs on her victim. But when the man was taken away and the house grew quiet, she crept into bed and cried a little; for the sadness of her life was troubling her, and she began to think the world was full of unhappiness and misadventure. Jenny Vincent heard her sobbing, and came and tried to comfort her, but she said,

“Go away, Jenny dear. I am better alone.”

She was quite the heroine of the seminary next day, poor child. Mrs. Grimes had a special supper in her honour, with actual champagne—a liquid not too frequently seen in ladies' seminaries. The girls of the establishment, most of them high-tempered young wenches, of hot patrician blood, who had been sent for Mrs. Grimes to reduce them to order in her

own way, were all mad about this new-comer, whose first act was to take a burglar in the very act. The seminary had never seen so festive a night; and I fear that even the Misses Grimes, stern as they were, took quite as much champagne as was good for them. It was far on in the short hours when the festival finished. It had been quite a holiday, and these young rebels were all happy. When Amelia and Jenny found themselves alone, Jenny said,

"What a day! And what a night before it! And how brave you are! I shall never fear robbers with you in the room."

"I don't fear anybody much," said Amelia, who was undressing as rapidly as she could. "But I should like some one to love. Good night, Jenny."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SLIPPERY ONE.

ALOUETTE.—Some one to love, papa. Yes, that's the wish I have.
Some one with whom to listen to the nightingales
When they are singing old delicious love stories;
Some one to watch me as I slumber quietly,
And perhaps disturb my dreams with just a kiss or two.

ASTROLOGOS.—Girls are such fools. Some one to plague and worry you,
Some one to take advantage of your weaknesses,
Some one to make a silly little slave of you.

The Comedy of Dreams.

POOR Amelia, heroine of this great adventure, cared nothing that she was probably the first school girl who had ever captured a burglar. She wanted some one to love. It certainly had been the want of her life. Her father's selfishness and her mother's weakness left her without any object or ideal. Perfectly innocent was the poor girl, or she might have gone wrong in her desire for some sort of affection; but, though awkward and dull, she had the natural instinct of goodness, and so she merely longed for consolation. She was quite ready to love Jenny Vincent very much indeed; but this malapert Jenny

could not help making occasional fun of her; and fun of that sort was a thing Amelia did by no means understand. She was a girl with whom friendship meant something—a rare thing among girls.

I think girls should learn Latin, if only to read Cicero *De Amicitia*. One of the weak points in modern life is the decay of real friendship. It is perishing among men, and seems to have altogether perished among women. It is a flower of life worth careful culture; and I rejoice to say that I have a few friends (a very few) who would do for me what I would do for them, even though life were on the risk. And among them are ladies! A note of ejaculation is needed. Can a lady, thinks the ordinary dolt, be a perfect friend to a man without what your Old Bailey barrister would call “ulterior purposes?” I trow not. It must be Platonic love, or love warmer than the Platonic. Dear reader, seest thou the result hereof? It shuts women out from the friendship of men; shunts them—reduces them to converse with nobody save curates and lady’s-maids. The dull folk in an agricultural parish, if they see a lady walking with a gentleman, instantly whisper something wrong; the parson, if he is a young fool, brought into the world to disestablish the Church, picks up this faintly-whispered gossip;

after which that lady's life becomes a misery to her. Of course her relations get frightened, and it is always your nearest and dearest who say the falsest things about you. As the wittiest Canon of St. Paul's remarked, the most dangerous animal to let loose among women is a wild curate.

Nobody burgled on that particular night: still a heroine awoke Amelia next morning. The girl's brain was growing rapidly. She thought much of her situation. She began to think of her father with the careless contempt which certainly he deserved. He had got her to school by a stratagem. She was quite well aware that to be at school would be of service to her, and she already, in a new situation, widely different from that in which she had spent the greater part of her life, felt her mind expanding. Amelia Laing was a plant of slow growth, but strong. A wise father would have made a splendid woman of her. Laing merely regarded her as a nuisance, though he saw possibilities in her; but he did not see how to develop those possibilities.

She slept, but not dreamlessly, that night. She was the heroine of the hour. Even the autocratic Mrs. Grimes, who all her life had been horrified by the thought of robbers, flattered this new pupil who

had actually caught one. There was, however, a difficulty raised by the Miss Grimeses or the Misses Grimes. I forget which is Lindley Murrayish. Ought a young lady to jump out of bed with nothing on but a night-dress in order to collar a robber? Is it proper? The Miss Grimeses or Misses Grimes, thought Amelia ought to be rewarded for catching that burglar, but punished for doing it in so light a costume. Mrs. Grimes held a different opinion.

“If the girl had waited to dress, my dears,” she said, “we should all of us have been murdered in our beds, or something of the kind. I think of giving her a gold watch as a memento of the affray, with an inscription saying she vanquished a robber with a revolver.”

Mrs. Grimes's daughters did not often argue with her much. The old lady was a quaint mixture of kindness and severity, and would stand no nonsense. They thought this proposed extravagance of hers a mistake, but they dared not remonstrate, so they said nothing, hoping that she would forget all about it.

Amelia continued the heroine of the hour. Mrs. Grimes was kinder to her than she had ever been known to be to any school-girl. Even the Penthe-

silean daughters petted her. As to the girls, they were all mad about her; they forced presents upon her, the delicate trifles girls love; they even got up a subscription among them, and bought for her a jewel-studded dagger of Toledo steel, "the ice-brook's temper," which was nominally a paper-knife. That seminary for young ladies grew very indolent; even the resolute Mrs. Grimes could not keep order.

And then, think! What a delight! Gentlemen calling on this important question. "*The Marquis de Castelcicala and Mr. Cotton.*" All the seminary was alive to see the Marquis: but I think Amelia was more on the alert to see that glazier. She was rather frightened about it, though. Jenny Vincent had heard her confession; might she not tell, and get her into trouble? Mrs. Grimes, it was well known, permitted none of her fair pupils to be in love. Even Amelia, after her heroic achievement, would be made a martyr if she were suspected of a flirtation with anybody—especially a mere working glazier. She did not, of course, know how Cotton came to be there; still less that her father, wickedly astute, had caused the rumour to be spread that she had gone away with him. Had she known of that paternal trick she could not have spoken to him.

The Marquis, who had come to London the moment news of the affair reached him, wanted to ascertain precisely what had occurred, and whether any clue was obtainable to the Slippery One's companion or companions. With him, besides Cotton, came a sagacious detective, who was supposed to have the keenest scent of all the Scotland Yard sleuth-hounds. But for the quick look of his eye you might have taken Inspector Fox, from his indolent air and well-made dress, for an unoccupied fashionable man, who seldom did anything except dine, play whist, and dance. Indeed, his nickname among his comrades was the "Lounger," for he managed, by his *insouciant* air, to evade recognition as a detective by all but the most experienced thieves. To Mrs. Grimes and her fair flock, some members of which he had to interrogate, he was rather unintelligible, but they certainly did not connect him with the police force; and their eyes were chiefly fixed on the handsome Italian, who was just the sort of man to fascinate girls.

"I have seen him before," whispered Jenny Vincent to Amelia. "He used to buy newspapers at my father's shop. He is a conspirator."

Amelia shuddered.

"How dreadful!" she exclaimed.

The only conspirators she had heard of were

those who, in *Magnall's Questions*, then the gospel of the seminaries, murdered Caius Julius Cæsar. She thought them base wretches; but the Marquis did not look at all like a base wretch. In any company he would have appeared a man of distinction. He had an air of easy command. To these fluttered schoolgirls in Miss Grimes's dovecote he was as great a wonder as Apollo to the shepherdess of Thessaly, what time Admetus was King.

Mr. Fox examined the room which the Slippery One had entered, and questioned everyone who had a chance of seeing whether the Slippery One appeared to have companions. In this way he got no information; but, when he came carefully to inspect the front garden, he traced with little difficulty the footprints of two persons. The Slippery One had a foot like a lady's, and was wont to wear elegant boots of a light description; the Parson had a flat splay foot, which Hoby himself could not retrieve from ugliness. It was a good deal like a flat iron. The physiognomy of detectives has much to do with the human foot, a very tell-tale member. Your thief walks not like your honest man. Inspector Fox could find traces of no third foot, so he concluded that the job was attempted by these two men only.

But, not hurrying his investigation, he found

something more, which proved eventually to be of great importance. Down in the midst of an aucuba there lay a small book, bound in red morocco, and lettered "Common Prayer." The parson, proud rather of his clerical nick-name, had set up what looked like a Prayer Book, having, indeed, a gold cross on its red cover, and elaborate clasps; but which, really, was a memorandum book. In it he had written ribald songs, which he was fond of singing in the thieves' resorts, having a fine tenor voice and a good ear. Among these songs were various memoranda, all in cypher. The Inspector pocketed that book with great satisfaction. Nobody noticed the find, and he told nobody: a shrewd fellow, he liked to keep his secrets to himself.

When they were gone, after being compelled by Mrs. Grimes to take that abomination in the way of refreshment, sweet cake and sweeter sherry, which caused the courtly Marquis to make a wry face, what a babble and chatter there was in the excited school! All idea of lessons and classes was abandoned. Even the music-master, that most important of all professors in the eyes of the schoolmistress, had to give up his work and take holiday. All the young heads were in a whirl of excitement, and Mrs. Grimes, finding that nothing could be done with them, sent them all out for a walk on Wimble-

don Common, and promised them charades and proverbs and a dance, if they chose, in the evening. She was a wise old lady, and knew how to mingle strict discipline with occasional fun. The girls all ran away with delight to put on walking costumes, and were soon trotting briskly across the breezy common towards Richmond Park, where, besides the big trees and the deer, they saw a little gentleman walking in profound meditation, and were quite unaware it was Earl Russell, pondering over a letter to the *Times*. They came back gaily to their afternoon meal, and the day ended with the saturnalia which Mrs. Grimes had promised. One charade was a great success. In the first act there was a parliamentary assembly, with a Miss Grimes as speaker, and a lively debate was carried on as to the expediency of depriving the male sex of all political rights. This ended in a division, when the majority in favour of the proposal was enormous. Jenny Vincent was the soul of this, for her father had described to her the methods of Parliamentary procedure, which he knew well, having himself been a reporter. Scene the second was a young lady dressed as nearly to resemble a page as seminarist decorum would permit: and the terrible way in which that page smashed glass, to the horror of his mistress, was almost beyond what pages ever do.

Need I say that in the final scene Jenny Vincent, with a nightdress over her frock, captured a nocturnal burglar of as ferocious aspect as could be found in the place? Amelia was hard pressed to react her own heroism, but firmly declined.

END OF VOL. I.

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